

VASSIL A. VASSILEV

BULGARIA-

13 Centuries of Existence



SOFIA PRESS

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BULGARIA AND THE BALKAN PENINSULA



Bulgaria occupies a territory of 111,000 square kilometres, has a population of 9 million and is situated in the heart of the Balkan Peninsula. It is a country of roses, staunch revolutionaries, famous singers and dancers. Its people are famous for their industriousness and hospitality.

A LAND OF ANCIENT CIVILIZATIONS

The Bulgarian state was founded in the year 681. Bulgaria is not only one of the oldest European states, but also a land in which man has appeared very early – some 150,000 years ago. Not far from the city of Stara Zagora, Central Bulgaria, the world's oldest and biggest copper mines have been discovered. They were exploited in the late 5th and early 4th millennium B. C. Metal tools ensured a labour productivity which was 30 times higher than that of stone tools, and their appearance brought about a veritable revolution in the development of human society. Besides, favourable climatic conditions made possible the comparatively early appearance of animal husbandry and plant-growing, which enriched the diet and made surer the existence of primitive man. Wheat was grown in the Balkans as early as the end of the 7th millennium B. C. and it was from here that it was spread to the rest of Europe.

The good climatic and material conditions determined the appearance on the territory of present-day Bulgaria of some of the earliest civilizations in history. Recently a gold trove was unearthed near the city of Varna, dating from the end of the 5th and early 4th millennium B. C. It is a proof not only of a high level of development of the crafts but also of an advanced stage of social stratification. The clay tablets with written signs on them found near the town of Vratsa, North-western Bulgaria, date back to approximately the same period.

The Thracians were the first population inhabiting the territory of present-day Bulgaria, known to science. In the works of the ancient Greek authors they are described as a numerous people, and Thrace – as a land of abundance and merriment. Thrace was the native land of the mythical musician Orpheus and of Spartacus, the leader of the slaves' uprising which shook the Roman Empire early in our era. During the past few decades Bulgarian archaeologists have unearthed imposing tombs with magnificent frescoes, impregnable strongholds, workshops and exquisite gold jewels and vessels.

After the 7th century B. C. a considerable number of colonies of the Greek poleis (city-states) were founded along the Thracian Black Sea coast. They started an animated trade and cultural exchange with the hinterland, thus creating a second cultural layer on the present-day Bulgarian territory – of another brilliant ancient civilization – that of the Greeks.

For a short period of time the Thracians fell under the domination of Philip of Macedon and of his son Alexander the Great. After two centuries of heroic resistance they



The Vulchitrun gold trove – 8th century B. C.

were conquered about the middle of the first century A. D. by the powerful Roman Empire. The long-continued domination of the Romans has left lasting vestiges in Bulgaria: roads, aqueducts, temples, public baths, masterpieces of ancient art, whole cities.

The so-called Great Migration of Peoples which started in the 4th century affected the Balkan Peninsula as well. Barbarian hordes of Goths, Huns, Avars and other tribes passed through it, leaving desolation and ruins behind them. The Roman Empire, torn by internal contradictions, could not resist the impact of the Barbarians and in the year 395 disintegrated into two parts – Western, whose capital was Rome, and Eastern, with Constantinople (Byzantium, present-day Istanbul) for its capital. In



Votive relief of the Thracian Horseman

476 the Western Roman Empire was destroyed by the Barbarian tribes, while the Eastern Roman Empire continued to exist for still another millennium under the name of Byzantine Empire.



Rytons shaped like women's heads from the Panagyurishte gold trove – 4th century B. C.

SLAVS AND PROTO-BULGARIANS

The Slavs were of the Indo-European stock of peoples, to which the German, Baltic-Slav, Greek, Celtic, Iranian and Indian tribes belonged. During the third millennium B.C. they inhabited a vast region in Eastern and Central Europe, bordering on the River Dnepr in the east, by the River Oder in the west and the Carpathian Mountains in the south. In the late 2nd and early 3rd century A. D. the Slavs began to move to the south and by the end of the 5th century they had settled in the plain between the Danube and the Carpathian Mountains. The Slav tribes which in-





Frescoes from the Kazanluk Tomb – 4th century B. C.

habited the territory near the estuary of the Danube and to the east of it were called Antae and those living in the lands of present-day Romania and Hungary – Slavini.

In the early 6th century, numerous Slav contingents began to cross the Danube, and to return with rich booty. Their daring incursions could not be stopped either by the fortified strongholds along the Danube and in the Balkan Range, or even by the Long (Anastasius') Wall built to defend the immediate approaches to the Byzantine capital. At the end of the same century, under the pressure of the powerful state of the Avars founded in Pannonia (present-day Hungary) and of new barbarian tribes coming from

Bronze helmet of a Thracian warrior

the east, the Slavs began to settle in the depopulated areas of the Balkan Peninsula, and even as far as the Aegean islands and Asia Minor. Because of their common language, religion and way of life, the Slav tribes which settled in Moesia (between the Balkan Range and the Danube), Thrace and Macedonia became known later as the Bulgarian Slavic Group, to be distinguished from the Serbo-Croatian Group which formed the western wing of the Southern Slavs.

Once they had settled in the Balkan provinces of the Byzantine Empire, the Slavs entered into direct contact with its highly developed material and spiritual culture, which accelerated their social and economic development. The Slavs, on their part, who had not passed through the stage of slavery, contributed to the 'rejuvenation' of the Empire and to doing away with the last vestiges of slave relations in it. The policy of assimilation adopted by the Byzantine Emperors with regard to the immigrants influenced the regions where the Slavs were not the predominant power (Central and Southern Greece, Asia Minor), but in Moesia, Thrace and Macedonia the Slavs were the masters of the situation. Too weak to oppose on their own the powerful pressure of Byzantium, the Slav tribes began to unite into tribal unions (the beginning of a state) and courageously to defend their independence. In their struggle against the Byzantine Empire during the last decades of the 7th century, they suddenly acquired a peerless ally in the Proto-Bulgarians.

The Proto-Bulgarians ethnically belonged to the Turkic tribes which inhabited the steppes of Central Asia. Their origin and name have to this day not been positively

established. It is known that early in our era they had settled in the northern part of the foot of the Caucasus. Those lands had been populated from time immemorial by the Sabiri and Alani. It is probable that the Alani gave the Proto-Bulgarians their name, for in the language of that tribe 'bulgaron' meant 'people living at the foot of the mountain'.

At the end of the 4th and the first half of the 5th century A. D. the Proto-Bulgarians became members of the motley conglomerate of peoples called 'Hunnish tribal union' and took part in the horror-sowing Hunnish raids in Central and Western Europe. After the Union disintegrated, part of the Proto-Bulgarians settled in Italy, others went back to their former places – along the northern Black Sea coast. For several decades they formed part of the powerful Avar Khaganate and numerous Proto-Bulgarian contingents again went as far as Pannonia and, after the internecine wars within the Khaganate during the middle of the 7th century, part of them went to settle in Italy, and another part, a more numerous one, led by Kouber, penetrated deep into the Balkan Peninsula and settled in the Bitola Plain in Macedonia.

The Proto-Bulgarians who had remained in their former settlements fell for a short time under the domination of Turkic tribes which had come from the east, but after a persistent and bloody struggle, they managed to free themselves and by the year 630 they had formed a powerful multi-tribal union known under the name of 'Great Bulgaria'. Legend has it that the leader of Great Bulgaria, Khan Koubrat, gathered his five sons at his death-bed and made them take turns in breaking a bunch

of tightly bound resilient twigs. After none of them succeeded in doing so, he undid the bunch and without any effort started breaking the twigs, with his fingers of an old man, one after the other. In this way he bequeathed to them his advice – never to quarrel or fight with each other, in order to be unbreakable, like the tightly bound bunch of twigs.

The sons, however, did not fulfil the behest of their wise father. After Koubrat's death, like the majority of all multitribal state formations at that time, 'Great Bulgaria' disintegrated under the impacts of the Khazars coming from the east. Part of the Proto-Bulgarians set out to the north and formed there, at the place where the Kama River discharges its waters into the Volga, the so-called Volga Bulgaria. Another part of them, led by Koubrat's son Asparouh, withdrew to the estuary of the Danube and started from there frequent incursions into the Byzantine lands to the south of the big river.

THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE BULGARIAN STATE

In the year 680 the Byzantine Emperor Constantine IV Pogonatus launched a massive attack, by land and sea simultaneously, against the Proto-Bulgarians and the Union of seven Slav tribes in Moesia. Asparouh, however, defeated his army and moved southwards as far as the Balkan Range. There he built his fortified camp of Pliska

(not far from today's town of Shoumen) and concluded an agreement with the chiefs of the seven Slav tribes for waging a joint struggle against the common enemy – the Byzantine Empire. This was not an agreement difficult to conclude, for Proto-Bulgarians and Slavs had known each other for quite a long time. They had been neighbours at the time of 'Great Bulgaria' and some of them had entered both the Hunnish Tribal Union and the Avar Khaganate. In order to check a further penetration of Proto-Bulgarians southwards, the Byzantine Emperor signed a peace treaty with Asparouh in the beginning of 681, recognizing officially the birth of the Bulgarian, or more precisely, of the Slav-Bulgarian state.

The new state spread between the Danube, the Black Sea, the Balkan Range and the Timok River to the west. It gradually enlarged its territory and came to occupy some time later the centre of the Balkan Peninsula. The land was beautiful and fertile, but very unquiet, for it was the crossroads of important routes linking the north with the south, Europe with Asia. In times of peace riches flowed in via the 'Old Road', which was also called 'Apia Trajana', 'The Military Road', 'The Diagonal Road'; intensive trade and cultural exchange was carried out which contributed to the country's rapid progress. The periods of peace, however, were shorter than those of war. Unlike the newly-created West-European states, which had emerged and developed upon the ruins of the Roman Empire and which were later reached by the barbarian waves after the latter had broken their crests, Bulgaria had had the impertinence to emerge in the very heart of the well-preserved Eastern Roman Empire and had to pay dearly for her imper-



A ceramic tablet featuring a lion. An old-Bulgarian monument from Stara Zagora, 8th century

tinence. The powerful Empire looked down on the uninvited newcomers and spared no effort in its attempts to throw them back to the other side of the Danube or to assimilate them in the way it had done before with numerous other barbarian tribes. This forced the Bulgarians to wage exhausting life-and-death wars in the course of centuries for their free national existence.

UNIFICATION OF THE BALKAN SLAVS INTO ONE SINGLE STATE

Asparouh's successor, Khan Tervel, not only succeeded in preserving what he had inherited from his father, but also expanded Bulgaria's frontiers to the south of the Balkan Range as far as Eastern Thrace. The Bulgarian ruler got involved in the struggles for the Byzantine throne which broke out in 705, helped Justinian II to ascend to it and in return had the new frontiers of his state confirmed by the new Emperor. Three years later the Byzantines broke the peace but the Bulgarians dealt them a crushing blow and their triumphant march ended under the walls of Constantinople. In 717 they were once again at the walls of Constantinople, this time as allies of the Byzantine Emperor in his war with the Arabs who had laid siege to his capital. The invincible Bulgarian cavalry attacked the camp of the Arabs, destroyed it and thus saved the Byzantine capital which was at the end of its resources. In expression of his gratitude, the Byzantine Emperor gave rich presents to Khan Tervel and proclaimed him 'Caesar'.

The death of Khan Tervel was followed by internecine struggles among the Proto-Bulgarian aristocracy, the 'boils', but the military campaigns undertaken by the Byzantines for doing away with the new state proved fruitless. By the century's end, under Khan Kardam, the internecine struggles were quenched, and under his successor, Khan Kroum (803-814) the Bulgarian state became one of the great political powers in Europe of those days. Khan Kroum was a tested warrior and a wise statesman; he ruled firmly and evoked respect in his

enemies who gave him the name of 'Kroum the Terrible'. In 805 the Bulgarians destroyed the once powerful state of the Avars in Pannonia, and in 809 they took the Byzantine stronghold of Serdica (later Sredets, present-day Sofia), thus cutting off the Old Road which was of vital importance to the Empire. The frontiers of the Bulgarian state reached as far as the River Hron (in present-day Slovakia) and the Bulgarians became neighbours of the Frankish Empire.

In order to consolidate the enormous successes of the young Bulgarian state, Khan Kroum issued the first laws in the history of the Bulgarian state and started the gradual replacement of the federal principle in the country's administrative division, which gave the Slav knyazes (princes) too great an independence, by the territorial principle. In his aspirations to enable Bulgaria to join the then civilized world and to strengthen the positions of the budding feudal aristocracy, Khan Kroum envisaged in his laws severe punishments for stealing, drinking, loose morals and insubordination to the central state power. The implacable ruler even ordered all vineyards to be pulled up by the roots.

Manifesting remarkable political far-sightedness, Khan Kroum pursued a consistent policy of unification of the Balkan and Panonian Slavs into one single state, which would be in a position to withstand the pressure on the part of the two Christian empires: the Byzantine Empire and the Frankish Empire. A decisive step was made under his rule towards liquidating the privileged status of the Proto-Bulgarian aristocracy with regard to the Slavs, and

towards the gradual merger of Slavs and Proto-Bulgarians into one ethnical community.

Constantinople was well aware of the plans of the ambitious Bulgarian ruler, who was winning victory after victory, for they represented a mortal danger for the Empire. In 811 Emperor Nicephorus I Genicus gathered a big army and perfidiously attacked Bulgaria. The Bulgarians were taken by surprise and were unable to offer serious resistance. The Byzantine troops entered easily the capital of Pliska. The Bulgarian Khan's offer to conclude peace was arrogantly rejected, and the Byzantine troops continued to pillage the country. Kroum was not late in gathering under his colours everybody who was able to carry arms and blocked the passes in the Balkan Range through which the Byzantine troops were to pass. When the latter entered a narrow pass, they suddenly found themselves surrounded on all sides. The retribution was terrible. Not a single enemy soldier of the huge army was left alive. The cream of Byzantine aristocracy, with the Emperor himself at the head, was killed there.

The following year the Bulgarians took by storm the Black Sea stronghold of Mesembria (present-day Nessebur), which was considered impregnable, after which they once again routed the troops of the Byzantine Emperor in Eastern Thrace. The tireless Bulgarian ruler was preparing for a decisive attack against the Byzantine capital itself when death interfered with his plans.

Khan Kroum stood at the head of the Bulgarian state for a little over a decade, but during his short rule he laid the sound foundations for a lasting upsurge of the Bulgarian state. His successor Omourtag (814-831)

expanded the boundaries of the state to the north-west as far as the **River Drava** (in present-day Yugoslavia). The administrative restructuring of the state on the territorial principle was ended under him. The autonomy of the Slav princes was definitely done away with and they became district rulers appointed solely by the Khan. Omourtag unfolded unprecedented in scope building activities and left at his death a centralized state with a modern for its time organizational structure.

Omourtag's successors Malamir and Pressian continued the policy of uniting the Balkan Slavs and annexed Central and part of Southern Macedonia to their state. This accelerated still further the process of assimilation of the small number of Proto-Bulgarians by the enormous Slav masses.

INTRODUCTION OF CHRISTIANITY AS AN OFFICIAL RELIGION

Christianity, which had been established as an official religion in the former Roman Empire as early as the 4th century A. D., had become firmly rooted in it by the end of the 9th century and was the ideological foundation of the early feudal civilization. The Bulgarians could by no means join this civilization unless they adopted Christianity as their official religion. In spite of the brilliant military victories of the Bulgarian Khans and Bulgaria's having become one of the most powerful European states, two centuries after its foundation the country was still belonging to the pagan, 'barbarian' world.

Converting Bulgarian to Christianity under Prince
Boris-Mihail. Miniature by Manasses

АДУУРЬИЗНАХЕТЬ ПЛАСТЬ ВЪСХУИТИ
ПРЪЖДІВЪ КЛЕНІН ПРЪЖДЕСІА



ЦРЬВЪ АШАВЛАКІДЪ ОНЪ И НАС
РЪНАКІЕ ФОТІА ИЗГНАЮ ЦРЬВЪ И ПА

НЪ СЪНАНЪ НХОТДЮЖЕСОУТА
ТИСЪНІАШТНЪ ГРѢБЪ И НАСГО
ЦРЬВЪ ВЛАСТЬ ПРЪЛОЖИ



The adoption of Christianity became a vital necessity, not only for settling the country's international situation, but also for its internal consolidation. Both Slavs and Bulgarians were heathens but they believed in different gods, had different ways of life and customs and this drew them apart, in spite of their belonging to one and the same state. The measures taken by Kroum and his successors for the legal and political equalizing of the two ethnical groups and for building up a centralized state apparatus were insufficient to create the indispensable internal ethnical link. Besides, the heathen belief in more than one god did not assist the establishment of the autocratic rule of the head of state.

Khan Boris (852-889) was a statesman who was acutely aware of these historical tasks and who daringly undertook to solve them. He had good reasons to feel apprehensive of the growing Byzantine influence in the country and sought the help of the German Emperor (in 843 the Frankish Empire was divided into three parts) asking him to serve as intermediary in Bulgaria's adoption of Christianity from Rome. Byzantium reacted without delay by organizing an impressive military campaign against Bulgaria. The condition for signing peace was that the Bulgarians should be converted to Christianity by the Byzantine Church.

One night, secretly from the boils the Khan was converted to Christianity, changing his title to Prince and adopting the Christian name of Mihaïl — the name of the Byzantine Emperor. After that priests sent expressly from Constantinople started converting *en masse* the population to Christianity. Many from among Boris's closest boils

considered his action as treason and as subjection of the Bulgarian state, which had been built up at the price of so many sacrifices and efforts, to its sworn enemy, the Byzantine Empire. The governors of ten districts, supported by the population, rose in rebellion against the Prince. Boris, who was fully aware of his responsibility for the future destinies of the Bulgarian state, crushed the uprising with an iron hand. Fifty-two boils together with their families, were executed, while the common rebels were set free. Boris was equally merciless several years later towards his son Vladimir, to whom he had ceded the throne while still alive. He had learned about Vladimir's secret preparations to re-convert the country to paganism and he deprived him of all power, ordering to blind him. The physical extermination of scores of boil families served as a strong impetus to the Slavization of the Bulgarian state.

After Boris had dealt with the unrest within the country, he directed his attention to the dangers from outside, which were not less perilous for the Bulgarian state. The country was swarming with Byzantine priests who, alongside preaching the new religion, were assiduously disseminating Byzantine influence among the population. In order to eliminate this influence the Prince started a consistent struggle for the establishment of a Bulgarian Church, independent from Constantinople. After the first refusal, he turned to Rome and for several years (866-870) the Bulgarian church passed under the spiritual guidance of the Pope. A heated dialogue between Pope Nicholas I and Patriarch Photius followed, deftly fanned by the Bulgarian Prince, who manifested himself as an excellent



Cyril and Methodius – the Slav enlighteners, from a 19th century icon

diplomat. The result was that the Christians in Bulgaria were returned to the guidance of the Patriarch in Constantinople, but with an archbishop of their own.

THE WORK OF THE SLAV ENLIGHTENERS CYRIL AND METHODIUS

Chance was on the side of Prince Boris in his struggle against the Byzantine danger. In 855 the brothers Cyril and Methodius evolved the Slav alphabet. They were born in Salonika of a Slav mother. Their father was a high-ranking Byzantine functionary. For some time the elder brother, Methodius, had been an administrator of a district with a predominantly Slav population. Later he became Father Superior of a big monastery in Asia Minor. Cyril got a brilliant education in one of the best schools at the time — the Magnaura School in Constantinople. After graduation, he started teaching there and in a surprisingly short time became one of the most eminent representatives of the early Mediaeval philosophy and literature. The Byzantine government sent the two brothers more than once as Christian missionaries to the Khazars and the Arabs, but their mission to Great Moravia left indelible traces in the history of the Slav peoples.

Rostislav, Prince of Great Moravia, had the same sort of problems with the systematic and massive attempts at assimilation on the part of the German clergy, as Boris had had with the Byzantine priests. In his desperate struggle against the Germanization of the Slavs in his

state, he requested in 862 from the Byzantine Emperor missionaries who would preach Christianity in a language comprehensible to the people and who would train Slav clergymen to replace the German ones. The Emperor's choice naturally fell on the two brothers, who had already composed the Slav alphabet, which was based on the vernacular of the Slavs in the environs of Salonika.

In Great Moravia, however, Cyril and Methodius revealed themselves not so much as ordinary Byzantine missionaries and agents, as apostles of Slav culture and education, with Slav blood running in their veins. In less than two years they succeeded in setting up a Slav Church, independent from the German bishops, and trained scores of disciples. Their activities acquired the character of a grandiose ideological, popular and political struggle which had wide-ranging international repercussions. In Cyril's own words the idea of a script in the living Slav language had been so dangerous and unusual, that it was enough 'to earn the name of a heretic for anyone who would only give it a thought'. The two brothers dared not only to give it a thought, but also to carry it through, to start a courageous struggle for the equality of the Slav language with all other languages, considered as 'civilized' at that time. What is more, in animated disputes with the most experienced polemicists of the Roman Catholic German church they succeeded in breaking the 'trilingual veto' of Mediaeval Europe, which prohibited any church service that was conducted in a language other than the three 'holy' languages: Latin, Greek and Hebrew.

The creation of the Slav script was a shield barring all attempts at foreign assimilation, because it contributed to

stepping up the self-awareness of the Slav peoples and their joining mankind's universal culture. The cause of the two brothers from Salonika was of great significance not only to the Slav peoples, but also to human progress in general. It was imbued with ideas which have not lost their topicality to this day: humanism, democracy, equality of all peoples. Cyril and Methodius rank among the brightest minds of their times, for in the darkness of the early Middle Ages they sowed the sparks which several centuries later kindled the fire of the Reformation.

On February 14, 869 Cyril died in Rome, while Methodius remained in Great Moravia as bishop until his death in 886. His death was also the death of almost everything they had created in that Slav country: the German clergy launched an irresistible attack against it and won a decisive victory. They destroyed mercilessly all Slav church service books, and subjected to ruthless persecution the numerous disciples of Methodius. The cause of the Slav enlighteners, however, did not perish. It was resurrected and bore rich fruit in another Slav country — Bulgaria.

CRADLE OF MEDIAEVAL SLAV CULTURE

At the time when the alarming events described above were taking place in Great Moravia, Bulgaria was the biggest and most powerful Slav state. Moreover, because of the reasons we have already mentioned, she was in great need of an alphabet and of a Christian clergy to preach in



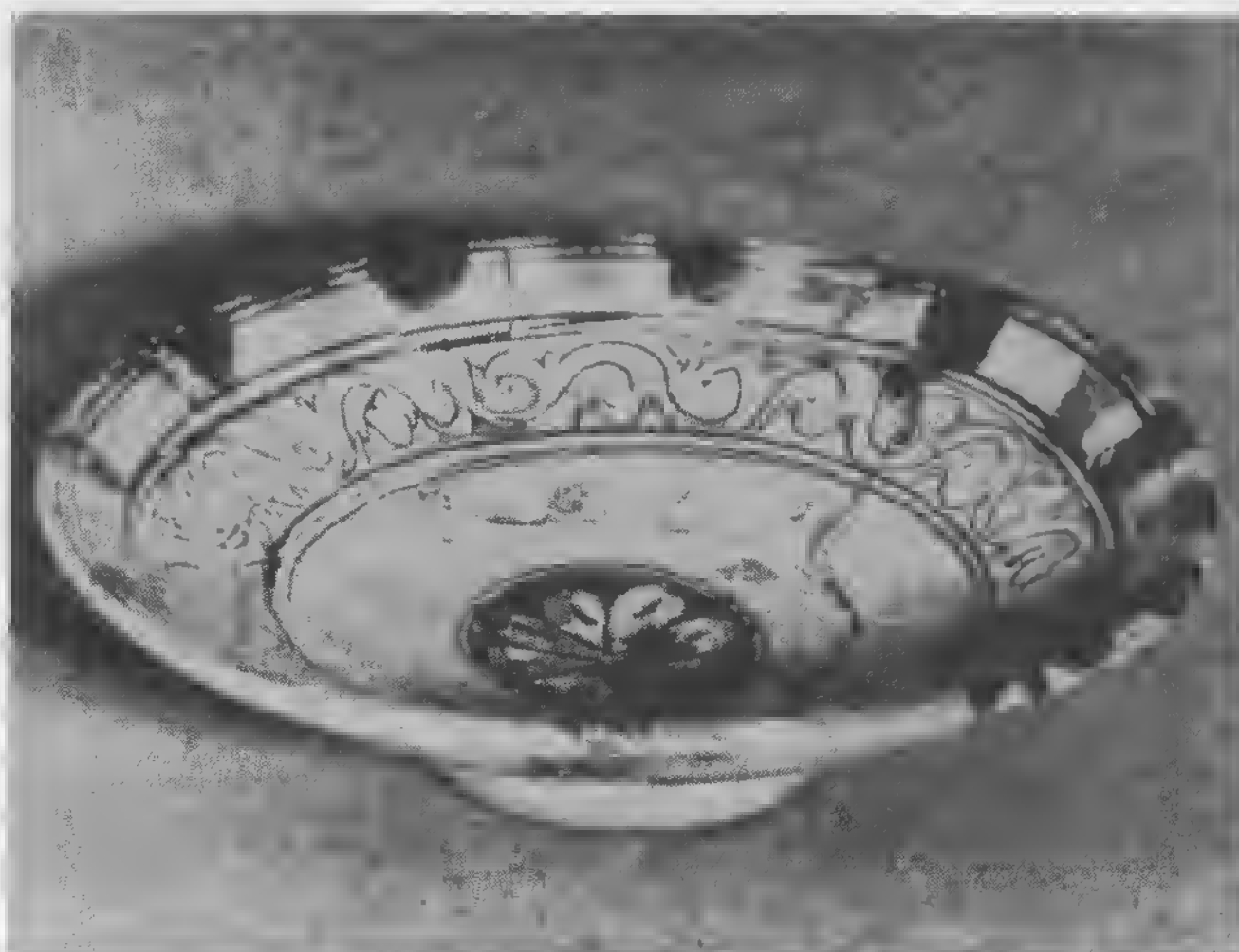
Tsar Simeon the Great, painted by Professor Dimiter Gyudjenov

the Slav language. The persecuted disciples of Methodius were fully aware of the needs and possibilities of the Bulgarian state, and after their teacher's death they set out for Bulgaria, which at that time had common frontiers with Great Moravia. The local district rulers in Bulgaria gave them a hearty welcome and sent them to the capital, where Prince Boris was eagerly awaiting them. Methodius's best known disciples who came to Bulgaria were Clement, Nahum and Angelarius. Clement was dispatched to the south-western parts of the country as Bishop of Ohrid, while the other two remained in the capital. In only a few years, hundreds of young people, thirsty for knowledge, were taught to read and write in the Slav-Bulgarian language and were then sent as priests and administrators to all parts of the country. Scores of religious books were translated from the Greek and ousted completely the Greek language from the church services.

In 893 Prince Boris organized a Grand Council in the capital of Preslav, which adopted important decisions. Boris's younger son Simeon ascended to the throne instead of Vladimir, the opponent to Christianity. The capital was transferred from heathen Pliska to Preslav. The Slav (old Bulgarian) language was proclaimed as official state and church language instead of Greek, while the numerous Greek clergy was replaced everywhere by Bulgarian priests. The sound foundations for the rapid development of an original Slav-Bulgarian culture were laid and the most important channels of Byzantine influence were cut off. The catalysts which were to speed up the process of merger between Slavs and Bulgarians, a process which had been going on for more than two centuries had been found.

The reign of Simeon, the greatest ruler of mediaeval Bulgaria, was marked with brilliant military victories which put the very existence of the Byzantine Empire to trial and turned Bulgaria into an empire. In a number of decisive battles, the biggest one at Acheloe (not far from present-day Nessebur), Simeon succeeded in crushing the military might of the Byzantines. He then led his armies in two victorious marches to the walls of Constantinople (in 921 and 923-924) which placed the Byzantine Empire on the brink of annihilation. The Bulgarian state extended from the Carpathian mountains in the north to the Aegean Sea and Central Greece in the south, from the Adriatic

Preslav ceramics



coast and present-day Croatia in the west to the Black Sea in the east. In other words, it occupied almost the entire Balkan Peninsula and present-day Hungary.

The might of the Bulgarian ruler was so great that the Byzantine Empire was forced to pay him tribute; it made him father-in-law of the Emperor who was a minor, did not oppose the solemn proclamation of the Bulgarian head of church as a Patriarch, independent from the church in Constantinople, and that of Prince Simeon as Tsar, i. e. Emperor 'of all Bulgarians and Greeks'.

Simeon built his state and army after the model of an empire. In the capital of Preslav he built impressive palaces and churches, vying with those in Constantinople.



In two or three decades Preslav became one of the major cities in Europe. The stone walls surrounding it were over three metres thick and ten metres high. The king's palaces and the so-called 'round' or 'golden' church were the most impressive buildings; their architecture was original and they were richly decorated with gilded domes, marble columns, monumental mosaics made of multi-coloured pieces of glass and ceramic cubes, original painted ceramics which scientists have called 'Preslav ceramics'. The exquisite artistry of Bulgarian ceramic art of that time found also expression in beautiful vessels and decorations, as well as in whole icons made of multi-colour ceramic pieces.

The country's cultural flourishing during the reign of Tsar Simeon has gone down in Bulgaria's history as 'the Golden Age of old Bulgarian literature and culture'.

No other country in Europe at the time, besides the Byzantine Empire, experienced such an intensive and fruitful cultural development. Nahum and Clement, lavishly supported and encouraged by the Bulgarian ruler, who had been educated at the famous Magnaura school in Constantinople, turned Preslav and Ohrid into genuine literary centres. Talented and patriotic-minded writers like Yoan Exarch (John the Exarch), Konstantin of Preslav, the monk Chernorizets Hrabur, Presviter Grigorii and Tsar Simeon himself worked there. Old Bulgarian literature, according to the spirit of the time, was religious in character, but in it we find also elements from natural history (particularly in the Hexameron by Yoan Exarch), borrowed from ancient literature. This is what makes it different from the early feudal literature of Western

Europe, which was extremely hostile to the literature of the ancients and had an entirely religious character. In this sense old Bulgarian literature, like Byzantine literature, threw a bridge between the ancient and the early feudal European civilization.

In addition to what has been said, Bulgaria had the merit not only of preserving the achievements of Cyril and Methodius, which would otherwise have been doomed to failure, but also of creating all the necessary prerequisites for their further development and genuine flowering. The Bulgarians were the first among the Slav peoples to create a rich literature of their own, written in their own language, which was called upon to play a Pan-Slavic role and to serve as an intermediary between the highly-developed Byzantine culture and the southern and eastern Slavs.

The Old Bulgarian language served as the basis of literary Russian and Serbian languages, and was for several centuries the church and official state language of Russians and Romanians.

THE BOGOMILS – PREDECESSORS OF THE REFORMATION

The numerous wars waged by Simeon, however, and his ambitious building programme had drained the resources of the country and proved a burden which the people were unable to support. At the same time, the development of feudal relations had turned the majority of the Bulgarian peasants from independent landowners into

cruelly exploited serfs. Discontent was seething among them. At the time when the Bulgarians were converted to Christianity, the Christian Church already had a biography which was five centuries old, which had led it away from the humane and democratic principles of Early Christianity and had turned it lastingly into a powerful ideological and political institution whose entire activity was aimed at preserving and consolidating the existing feudal social order. What is more, the Church itself was a big feudal landowner with definite administrative and juridical functions, and the supreme clergy was a component of the ruling feudal class. In such conditions and in view of the predominant religious world outlook among the people, the popular discontent inevitably acquired a religious form.

Thanks to the epoch-making work of Cyril and Methodius, there was a popular rural intelligentsia in Bulgaria of a scope inconceivable for the 'new' west-European states, where literary language and vernacular were divorced. The literate people, who had read religious books, were not slow in perceiving the gap separating the social order sanctioned by the church and the principles embodied in the Bible, so that many of them became ideologists of the people's discontent. Thus, in the 920s the Bogomil movement came into being, which was also known as 'the Bulgarian heresy' – one of the most powerful heretic movements of the early Middle Ages. It was religious in form and profoundly social in content: it was the movement of the dependent peasantry and urban poor against the feudal social system.

The Bogomil movement got its name from its initiator

– Priest Bogomil. Like other mediaeval Christian heresies, such as those of the Paulicians and Massalians which had existed before the Bogomil movement, it was based on the dual principle of good and evil which were in constant opposition. The Bogomils preached that the world man lives in was the creation of the evil forces, and for that reason the rulers on earth – tsars, boyars, superior clergy, etc. – were servants of the devil and to fight them meant to fight Satan and to serve God. The ideal of the Bogomils was the early Christian community, such as it was described in the New Testament and they built their communes after its pattern.

Like all peasant heresies of the time, the Bogomil ideology too contained certain retrograde and utopian elements. To revive the early Christian commune was an unrealistic task, for social development had gone far ahead. This and other negative features of the movement, however, were compensated by the critical, militant charge contained in the Bogomil teaching.

The contribution of the Bogomils to the dissemination of education among the people and to enriching old Bulgarian literature was of particular importance. The literary works of the Bogomils were so voluminous that they created in fact a second literary stream alongside the official one in Mediaeval Bulgaria. These works were characterized not only by their greater rationalism, but also by a vivid and picturesque language. It is to be pitied that this underground literature of the Bogomils was persecuted and mercilessly destroyed in the course of centuries. Only a few samples of it have come down to us: 'The Secret Book', 'The Cathari Book of Prayers' and a

few more. Bogomil literature marked its flowering during the 11th and 12th centuries. Books of the Bulgarian Bogomils were translated into Latin, Greek, French, Russian, Serbian, Romanian, Ethiopian and other languages.

The influence and significance of the Bogomil movement was by far not confined to Bulgaria. During the 11th century it was extremely influential in Asia Minor, Bosnia, Croatia, Dalmatia and, from there, during the next two centuries, the ideas of the Bogomils penetrated Western Europe and became particularly influential in France and Italy, among the Cathari. 'The heresy of the Cathari', an anonymous chronicle from the Middle Ages reads, 'was brought here from the lands lying on the other side of the sea, namely from Bulgaria; from there it was disseminated in many countries where it became extremely popular, viz. in the regions of Languedoc, Toulouse and Gascogne. That is why the Albigenses were also called Bougri, from Bulgarians... At first the bishop of the Cathari was a certain Marco, who ruled over all Lombardians, Toscanians and Marcians. This same Marco had been made bishop by Bulgaria'. The Cathari held the Bogomil preachers from Bulgaria in great esteem and invited many of them to be their leaders. The Grand Council of the Cathari held in Saint Felicien (Southern France) in 1167 was chaired by the Bulgarian Bogomil 'bishop' Nikita. The Cathari translated Bogomil books *en masse* and used them in their services.

In Bulgaria the development of the Bogomil movement was marked by alternating periods of cruel persecutions and of tolerance on the part of the secular authorities. By the early 14th century the Bogomil ideology had acquired

† ВІ НМА ѿ ТІ ЧАНСЪ
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1. † ВІ НМА ѿ ТІ ЧАНСЪ
2. ННА НСТАГО ДОУХЪ Д
3. ЗЪСАМО ННІ БРАБЪ БЪ

Old-Bulgarian memorial inscription of Tsar Samuil.
 993

a pronounced ascetic, mystical and conciliatory character, it had lost its militant spirit and after Bulgaria's fall under Ottoman domination (end of the 14th century), when the Christian religion as a whole was subjected to persecution on the part of the ruling Mohammedan religion, the Bogomils mitigated their critical attitude towards it and their movement gradually disappeared. Almost simultaneously, turned to ashes by the stakes of the Inquisition, the movement of the Cathari ceased to exist in Western Europe.

DECLINE OF THE BULGARIAN STATE

Under Simeon's successor, Tsar Peter, the Bulgarian state began to decline irresistibly. The Magyars took away the Bulgarian lands north of the Danube. The Serbians rose to arms and won their independence. Chaos reigned in the country. Encouraged by Bogomil preachers, the peasants refused to pay taxes and to perform the diverse corvées. The number of feudal lords (boyars) who refused to obey the Tsar was growing, which weakened the central power.

The Byzantine Empire could hardly have found a more opportune moment to square accounts with its dangerous northern neighbour. In 968, summoned by the Byzantine Emperor, Russian contingents of the Kiev Prince Svyatoslav invaded North-Eastern Bulgaria. The Byzantines, however, were taken by surprise when Svyatoslav signed an agreement with the Bulgarian Tsar Boris II for joint struggle against Byzantium. In face of

this fresh menace, the Empire gathered forces and in 971 managed to defeat the Russian and Bulgarian troops. Boris II was taken prisoner and brought to Constantinople, but this was not the end of the Bulgarian state. After the fall of the Bulgarian capital and of the eastern parts of the country, the other regions continued to offer stubborn resistance for another half century. The sons of Komit Nikola – David, Moses, Aaron and Samuĭl – played an exceptional role during the years of this resistance. They were rulers of southwestern Bulgaria. The first two were killed in battle, Aaron as bribed by the Byzantines and Samuĭl killed him for this treason.

Samuĭl proclaimed himself as Tsar of Bulgaria and Prespa (today in Yugoslavia) – as his capital. He waged a manly struggle against the Byzantines for almost thirty years, and for a short period of time he even enlarged his state by liberating the country's northeastern part and conquering the whole of Thessaly, present-day Albania, and some Serbian territories. In 986 Samuĭl dealt a crushing blow on the Byzantine Emperor Basil II at the Trayanova Vrata Pass (Trayan's Gate) near the town of Ihtiman. The Emperor saved himself by some miracle and for a long time had no desire whatever to fight the Bulgarians. Almost twenty years had passed before he ventured again to attack Bulgaria in 1014.

The armies of Bulgaria and Byzantium, led by the two rulers, met at the northern foothills of the Belassitsa Mountains, not far from the present-day town of Petrich. The front attack brought the Byzantines no success, so they used roundabout paths, appeared in the Bulgarians' rear and routed the army. Basil had his revenge for the

defeat at Trayanovi Vrata, but he was not satisfied. In order to break the morale of the Bulgarians and make them give up all further resistance, he ordered all 14,000 Bulgarian soldiers taken prisoner to be blinded and sent them back to Samuil in Prespa through the winter blizzards. He had left one soldier with one eye in every 100 blinded men to show them the way. For his cruelty which had no equal even in those cruel times, Basil II was nicknamed Bulgaroctonos – Slayer of the Bulgarians.

After Samuil's death, Bulgaria resisted for another four years and it was only at the end of 1018 that Byzantium conquered the whole of the country. This was the end of the First Bulgarian Kingdom, which had existed for three and a half centuries. The Bulgarian people fell under foreign domination which sharply deteriorated their political and economic situation. To make things worse, new nomad tribes started invading the Bulgarian lands during the 11th and 12th centuries – Usae, Pechenegs and Kumanians. They were powerless before the impregnable Byzantine strongholds, but they brought death and ruin to the defenceless Bulgarian peasants. The West-European crusaders who passed through Bulgaria on their way to Jerusalem also brought countless misfortunes to the Bulgarians, because after the split between the Roman Curia and the Constantinople Church in 1054 the crusaders started treating the Eastern Orthodox Christians almost as heretics.

The conquerors also had their problems with the conquered Bulgarians. In 1040 Samuil's grandson Peter Delyan raised a mass uprising which proved a tough job for the Byzantines to suppress. In 1072 another mass up-

rising broke out, this time near Skopje, under the leadership of Georgi Voiteh. The insurgents had the support of the Serbian ruler, but after months of bloody battles they were defeated by the numerous troops of the Emperor. Then a series of armed mutinies broke out in 1074, 1079 and 1084 in the Danubian towns of Bulgaria and in Sofia, Mesembria, in the region of Plovdiv. The Bogomils, who had earlier waged a fierce struggle against the Bulgarian clerical and secular aristocracy, manifested themselves as ardent patriots and fighters against foreign oppression.

Internecine struggles broke out in the Byzantine Empire during the 1180s and the Empire's enemies abroad took advantage of this. A wave of Seldjuk Turks attacked from the east, the Magyars – from the north. In 1183 the Magyars reached as far as Sofia and established their rule over the Empire's northwesternmost parts. Two years later the Normans, living in Italy, started their invasion and occupied the second largest city of the Empire – Salonika. Numerous Bulgarian detachments joined the Normans and fought courageously against the oppressors.

The boyars Assen and Peter made an adroit use of the Empire's difficulties. Their domains were in the region of the town of Turnovo. In the autumn of 1185 they raised an uprising against Byzantine rule, which spread quickly all over Northern Bulgaria. After long preparations, in the autumn of 1186 Emperor Isaac Angel started with his numerous troops for Turnovo. Peter and Assen avoided the decisive battle with the adversary, whose numbers were many times greater and retreated with their élite troops to the other side of the Danube where their allies,

the Kumanians lived. Soon after that the two brothers again crossed the Danube at the head of a numerous army composed of Bulgarians and Kumanians. They pushed the Byzantine army to the other side of the Balkan Range and the military actions were transferred to other Bulgarian regions. Isaac Angel again set out with his whole army against the Bulgarians, but suffered a serious defeat in 1187 at the Tryavna Pass and was forced to sign a peace treaty with Peter and Assen. This peace marked the rebirth of the Bulgarian state after nearly 170 years of foreign domination. This time Turnovo was proclaimed capital of Bulgaria.

RESTORED FORMER MIGHT

Initially, the newly liberated Bulgarian state had roughly the same frontiers as at the time of Asparouh. After Assen and Peter, who had fallen victims to dynastic schemes, the country was ruled by their younger brother Kaloyan (1197-1207), who was a remarkable military commander and diplomat. In 1201 he forced the Byzantine Emperor to sign a peace treaty which included within Bulgaria the Black Sea coast and most of Macedonia. In order to guarantee his independence from Byzantium and to win the benignancy of the knights of the Fourth Crusade in passing through the country Kaloyan signed in 1204 a *Unia* with the Pope. The Bulgarian ruler was thus granted the title of King and the Turnovo Archbishop, as head of the Bulgarian church, received the title of Primas.

The crusaders, however, left to others the glory of liberating the Holy Land and preferred to stay in Constantinople, famous for its wealth and glitter. They took it by storm in spite of the icons and church gonfalons hanged out on the fortress walls and founded on the Balkans their own state — the Latin Empire, with Constantinople as its capital. The Byzantine Empire continued to exist, but was divided into two parts — the Nicaean Empire in Asia Minor and the Epirus Despoty in present-day Greece.

Kaloyan tried to live in peace with his new neighbours, but in return he received arrogance and endless territorial claims. In the spring of 1205 the Latin Emperor Baldwin prepared a big campaign with the aim of crushing Bulgaria. Kaloyan, however, was well prepared and was the first to cross the Latin border. On April 14, 1205, the decisive battle between the two armies took place near Adrianople. Kaloyan was familiar with the advantages and drawbacks of the heavily armoured Latin army and began the battle with lightning attacks by the mercenary Kumanian cavalry. The heavily armed knights rushed after the Kumanians but fell into the trap prepared by Kaloyan. The West-European knights, who until then had been considered invincible, suffered a disastrous defeat. 'The cream of Latin knighthood has perished,' exclaimed bitterly Robert de Clary, participant in the battle. Baldwin himself was taken prisoner and ended his days imprisoned in a tower in Turnovo. This was one of the greatest military victories of Bulgaria during the Middle Ages and it raised the prestige of the Bulgarian King to unprecedented heights. Thus, the Latin Empire was dealt a severe blow soon after its establishment and it never



*Part of the fortification wall of Veliko Turnovo,
Bulgaria's mediaeval capital*

recovered from it. The designs of the arrogant Latins to establish their supremacy in the Balkans had been cut at their roots.

Kaloyan took immediate advantage of his victory at Adrianople and tried to free the whole of Thrace. In 1207, the Bulgarian army besieged Salonika, but Kaloyan was dastardly murdered by a hired killer. The throne was then occupied by Tsar Boril who became famous not for his military exploits, but rather for his persecution of the Bogomils. In 1218 he was overthrown and the crown went to its legitimate heir – Ivan Assen II, son of Assen I, the founder of the Second Bulgarian Kingdom.

Ivan Assen II proved worthy of the memory of his father, and during his reign Bulgaria reached its former might. What is most remarkable about Ivan Assen II is that he, like Prince Boris before him, achieved most of his successes by peaceful means. He became guardian of the under-aged Latin Emperor Baldwin II, concluded peace with the Epirian ruler Theodor Comnenus and through well calculated dynastic marriages established lasting peaceful relations with Hungary and Serbia.

The only war of any significance waged by Bulgaria during the reign of Ivan Assen II was that with the Despot of Epirus, Theodor Comnenus, who had made it his aim to restore the past grandeur of the Byzantine Empire. Perfidiously, he broke in 1230 his peace treaty with Bulgaria and invaded South Bulgaria at the head of a numerous army. His perfidy, however, was justly punished. In the bloody battle which was fought near the village of Klokotnitsa (northwest of the town of Haskovo) his army was

routed and Theodor Comnenus himself was taken prisoner, together with his entire retinue.

The Bulgarians had not forgotten the inhuman cruelty of Basil II, but their King proved that he was a strong and wise man by displaying great magnanimity. He freed all prisoners, Theodor Comnenus included, without touching a hair of their heads. The Bulgarian state annexed new vast territories and again, as during Simeon's reign, its frontiers came out on three seas: the Black, the Aegean and the Adriatic.

The reign of Ivan Assen II was marked not only with the restoration of Bulgaria's former political might, but also with a remarkable economic and cultural upsurge. Animated handicraft and urban centres appeared, new commercial roads and public buildings were built. Ivan Assen II was the first Bulgarian king to mint his own coins. In 1253 he signed a trade agreement with the flourishing at that time Dalmatian city of Dubrovnik (Ragusa), which contributed a lot to boosting economic life in the country.

After 1235 Ivan Assen rendered military assistance to the Nicaean ruler to chase the Latins away from Constantinople and restore the Byzantine Empire. This led to a break of the *Unia* with Rome and to Bulgaria's return to the Eastern Orthodox Church. The head of the Bulgarian Church again received the title of Patriarch, as during Simeon's time. Ivan Assen II died in 1241, after having achieved for Bulgaria as much and even more than his greatest predecessors. It was an unfortunate concurrence

of circumstances that the end of his reign also marked the end of the achieved political balance on the Balkans, the end of a lasting and beneficial peace for the Bulgarians.

THE PEASANT TSAR

After the death of Ivan Assen the most influential boyar families started bloody internecine struggles for the throne, which were skilfully used by Byzantium for enhancing its influence among the Bulgarian aristocracy. During the reign of Konstantin Assen(1257-1277), who lacked will power and was incapable as a ruler, a number of feudal lords separated themselves from the central power, while the Byzantines conquered vast Bulgarian territories in Thrace and Macedonia. Konstantin Assen married the Byzantine princess Maria, after which the Byzantines began openly to command in Turnovo.

The unceasing feudal internecine struggles and the frequent incursions by Byzantine troops resulted in economic ruin and sharp deterioration of the situation of the peasant masses, which became disastrous when the Tartars made their appearance in the North – a numerous and belligerent people from the steppes who had already subordinated most of the divided Russian principalities. The boyars, hidden behind the stone walls of their fortresses, left the defenceless peasants at the mercy of the Tartars. Konstantin Assen himself became a vassal of the Tartar Khan Nogai.

The people, left to themselves, had to think about their

own defence. In this struggle, the name of the swineherd Ivailo from Northeastern Bulgaria gained ever increasing popularity. In 1277 at the head of a group of dare-devils, he routed several Tartar detachments which had set out to loot the villages. Ivailo's glory spread with lightning speed throughout the country and soon he had gathered a whole army under his colours, consisting mainly of desperate peasants in search of protection. The Tartars were chased to the other bank of the Danube and then came the turn of the avid and venal boyars, who had caused to the people even more sufferings than the Tartars.

In the style of mediaeval superstition, Ivailo declared that he had heard a voice from heaven ordering him to save his people from those who looted and tortured them. The peasant volunteers in his army, who had risen to defend their land and homes from the foreign invaders, turned into an insurgent army which captured a number of feudal castles, storehouses for food and arms and was headed for the capital. The tsar, who had not dared come out of Turnovo's walls while Ivailo's peasant forces were shedding their blood to repel the Tartars, rallied his army and set out against Ivailo's 'rabble'. The latter, steeled in the cruel battles with the Tartar hordes, defeated the army of the Tsar in the very first encounter. The Tsar himself fell in the battle.

The peasant leader entered Turnovo triumphantly, welcomed enthusiastically by the people and with servile homage paid him by the boyars, who were scared to death. A Crown Council, hastily convened, proclaimed Ivailo Tsar and the widowed Tsarina changed her mourning for a wedding dress. The 'idyll' in Turnovo, however, did not

last long. The Tartar hordes of Nogai again invaded the country from the north and Ivailo had very soon to exchange his royal mantle and the splendour of his court for the hardships of army life.

In a great number of bloody battles which lasted for over two years, the 'peasant Tsar' succeeded in chasing the Tartars away; but while his courageous soldiers were defending their country's independence, a boyar revolt was coming to a head in the capital. With the help of the cunning Tsarina the boyars had come into contact with the Byzantine government, and asked for help against Ivailo. The Byzantine troops passed the Balkan Range without encountering any resistance, and the boyars themselves opened to them the gates of Turnovo. Ivailo's army defeated the Byzantines, but mercenaries hired by the boyars attacked him from behind. Ivailo escaped to his previous adversaries – the Tartars – and found his death there. An end was thus put in 1280 to the peasant uprising in Bulgaria.

In spite of its tragic end, Ivailo's uprising is a fact of great importance not only for Bulgarian, but also for European history. It is the earliest known organized peasant anti-feudal uprising of such a scale and scope in Europe, and Ivailo was the first peasant leader in those days who succeeded in seizing state power and in holding it for more than three years. Credit is also due to the Bulgarian peasants who had risen in revolt against feudal exploitation, for having barred with their blood the way of the Tartar hordes to Bulgaria and for having weakened their pressure against the Balkans and Central Europe.

DECLINE

After the defeat of the peasant uprising, the boyars placed Georgi Terter on the throne. His twelve-year-long reign has gone down in history marked by the fact that the Tartars resumed their incursions and made him their vassal. During the reign of the next Bulgarian Tsar, Smilets, the Tartars established their complete rule over Bulgaria. In 1298 Smilets was dethroned and Nogai's son Chaka ascended the Bulgarian throne. In less than two years, however, Chaka fell victim to a plot and the throne was occupied by Terter's son Todor Svetoslav, who ruled for 21 years. During his reign Bulgaria waged successful wars against Byzantium and succeeded in taking back the region enclosed between the Balkan Range, the Strandja Mountains and the Black Sea.

Immediately after Todor Svetoslav's death in 1321, Bulgaria lost these lands. While Bulgaria was going through a period of decline, another Slav state in the Balkans, Serbia, was enjoying its greatest upsurge and conquered a considerable part of Bulgaria's southwestern lands. The Bulgarian troops were routed at the battle of Velbuzhd (present-day Kyustendil) in 1230, and Tsar Mihail Shishman, the founder of Bulgaria's last dynasty, perished in the battle. The country became dependent on Serbia, and Ivan-Stefan, the son of the victor at Velbuzhd, Stefan Dechanski, was proclaimed Tsar of Bulgaria.

The Serbian prince, however, had even less luck than the Tartar Chaka and held the Bulgarian throne for only several months. The hegemony of Serbia was done away with and the boyars elected Ivan Alexander as Tsar. His

reign was the longest in Bulgarian history – 40 years – but he proved incapable of halting the decline of the Bulgarian state. As regards her territory, Bulgaria shrank to the size from where Asparouh and the Assenids had started. Even in this limited territory, however, she was not a closely rallied political unit, for feudal fragmentation gained the upper hand over central power. The boyars Balik and Dobrotitsa formed an independent feudal principality in the whole of Northeastern Bulgaria, later called Dobroudja after Dobrotitsa's name. Ivan Alexander, while still alive, divided his kingdom between his two sons Ivan Stratsimir and Ivan Shishman. Stratsimir got the western part of the country with Vidin for capital, and Shishman – the eastern part whose capital was Turnovo.

A SECOND 'GOLDEN AGE'

In complete contrast with the political impotence of the Bulgarian state, mediaeval Bulgarian culture marked a fresh summit in its development during the 14th century. The comparatively long reign of Ivan Alexander, the animated economic life and the rich cultural democratic traditions were the reason why the 14th century European Renaissance was able to manifest itself here earlier and with greater strength. Whereas in Western Europe the towns were dependent on the feudals and this checked their development, in the Balkans most of the larger towns depended on the central state power and as a rule the urban population was unaware of any feudal dependence.

Miniature of Tsar Ivan Alexander's gospel. 14th century

+ ЦОРАКЪ ГАКАВЪ ИАА
 ИНОКОПРСКЪ ИЕИНАА
 ЦРЦА. ИСААДОДЪЖИНА
 ВЪСЪДЪ

КАТГАРОВА
 ИГЪКОМА

ИОАНЪААХАНЪ
 ИСААДОДЪЖИНА
 ВЪСЪДЪКАТГАРОВА
 ИГЪКОМА



The rulers were interested in stimulating the trades, commerce and the arts in every possible way.

The unimpeded and even encouraged development of the towns was favourably reflected on the development of the arts and on the country's cultural life for, as is known, the appearance of the Renaissance was connected precisely with the upsurge of the towns. Besides, another equally important difference existing between the Balkans and mediaeval Central Europe played its role, too. In the West, the Church had an emphatic predominance over secular life and had placed all cultural life under its subordination, while in the Balkans, because of a number of objective reasons, secular power and hence the secular principles played an indisputably predominant role. The Balkans belonged to the Byzantine cultural community which was characterized by the presence of a remarkable ancient cultural heritage, which served as a bridge to the realistic and humanistic trends of the Renaissance.

Renaissance tendencies appeared in Bulgarian pictorial art as early as the first half of the 13th century. The master-painters of the so-called Turnovo School of Painting, who painted the icons in scores of churches all over the country, boldly turned away from the church canons. The saints painted by them were living men and women of flesh and blood, their compositions were freer and the way of life of the ordinary people of the time was ever more clearly reflected in the various religious scenes they painted. The most famous frescoes of those times are the ones preserved to this day in the Boyana Church near Sofia, in the Zemen Monastery near Kyustendil, in the churches carved in the rocks near the village of Ivanovo,

Roussé district, in Hrelyo's Tower, which defended the Rila Monastery and elsewhere.

During the second half of the 14th century the arts and crafts received a significant impetus as well as the art of decorating church books with exquisite miniatures. Time has spared for us two books which were decorated on the order of Tsar Ivan Alexander — a Bulgarian translation of the Chronicle of Manasses, a Byzantine chronicler, and a Tetraevangelicum. These masterpieces not only of the Bulgarian, but also of the European Middle Ages, which are an irreplaceable source of Bulgarian history, are kept among the most valuable manuscripts in the Vatican Library in Rome, and in the British Museum in London.

It is difficult for secular literature to flourish in a doomed and declining country, and that is why Bulgarian literature of the 14th century does not have its Dante and Petrarca. Instead of this, however, Bulgarian literature gave to the Eastern Orthodox world religious writers of exceptional stature. During Ivan Alexander's reign the Kilifarevo Monastery near Turnovo became a centre of very lively literary and cultural activities. It was here that Theodosius of Turnovo worked, an eminent theoretician of Hesychasm, — a religious teaching preaching extreme mysticism and asceticism, which was also called 'militant Orthodox Christianity'. The Kilifarevo School turned out a number of prominent theologians and religious writers, disciples of Theodosius of Turnovo. The most famous among them was Patriarch Evtimi — the last Bulgarian patriarch before Bulgaria was conquered by the Turks. In the course of five years he managed to set up a whole university in the small monasteries near Turnovo; there,

besides Bulgarians, foreigners also studied, mainly Russians, Serbs and Romanians. Patriarch Evtimi is the author of scores of works, whose religious content does not hide his original literary style, rich in artistic comparisons, vivid natural pictures and militant patriotism. Of particular importance was the spelling reform introduced by Patriarch Evtimi, whose aim was to create a unified literary language. The literary style of the entire Turnovo School was characterized by an elevated lofty tone aimed at causing a patriotic upsurge among the Bulgarian people, to prepare them for the forthcoming bloody battles with the Ottoman invaders.

The great religious writers Grigorii Tsamblak, Konstantin Kostenechki, Cyprian and others developed under the direct influence of Patriarch Evtimi. After the Ottomans invaded Bulgaria they continued their useful activities abroad. Grigorii Tsamblak was elected bishop of Kiev and Cyprian became Metropolitan of Moscow. Konstantin Kostenechki emigrated to neighbouring Serbia where he wrote, among many other things, a biography of the Serbian King Stefan Lazarevic.

Parallel with the official literature, as at the time of the 'Golden Age', a rich apocryphal literature developed, written by unknown authors from among the people. The apocryphal works can be divided into two large groups — one dealing with economic and everyday life, and another one dealing with the eternal questions of the origin of the world and man. The most famous apocryphal works which have survived from the second group are 'The Vision of Isaiah', 'Enoch' and the 'Sermon of the Three Saints'.

The spirit of the Renaissance was felt not only in the apocryphal works and in some of the works of Patriarch Evtimi, but also in a considerable number of translated literary works on secular topics, such as 'The Fable of Troy', 'The Alexandria' (about the life and exploits of Alexander the Great), 'Physiologist' (descriptions of various plants, animals and minerals), historical chronicles by the Byzantine authors George Hamartol (9th century), Zonara (12th century), Konstantin Manasses (12th century), local variants of pre-biblical legends, etc.

The remarkable upsurge of Bulgarian art and literature during the second half of the 14th century placed Bulgaria in the front ranks of the countries which were headed for the new times. This promising upsurge was, however, crudely nipped in the bud by an external factor – the last barbarian wave which flooded the European South-east in the 14th and 15th century – the onslaught of the Ottomans.

DOWNFALL OF THE BULGARIAN STATE

While the Balkan states were exhausting their strength in feudal disunity and rivalries (there existed by the middle of the 14th century 40 independent feudal possessions in the Balkans), stormy clouds appeared from Asia, ominously threatening the Balkan peoples. The beginning of the 14th century marked the onward march of the Ottoman Turks. In 1352 they captured the Tsimpe stronghold on the Gallipoli Peninsula and two years later

the Gallipoli fortress, thus placing the Dardanelles under their control. The Byzantine Emperor offered to Serbia and Bulgaria to act in concert against the invaders, but they turned a deaf ear to his desperate appeals. During the 1360s Sultan Murad I conquered the whole of Eastern and part of Northern Thrace, including the big cities of Plovdiv and Stara Zagora.

The local population, left without protection by the Byzantine government, organized its defence on its own. The Bulgarian feudal lord Momchil rejected the suzerainty of the Byzantine Emperor and established his rule over the entire Rhodope region and part of the Aegean coast. Momchil's several big victories over the Ottomans won him great popularity and his fame rivalled that of Ivailo before him. His army consisted not only of men from the regions directly afflicted by Turkish incursions but also of discontented peasants from all over Bulgaria. Constantinople became even more afraid of Momchil's men than of the Turks. A Byzantine-Turkish alliance against the rebellious boyar was hastily concluded and the small state of Momchil, who had risen to the position of a genuine popular leader, was wiped away.

After Momchil, two feudal lords from Macedonia – Vukashin and Ouglesh – decided to cross swords with the Ottomans but they were utterly defeated in a battle near Chernomen, not far from Adrianople, and fell in that battle, after which Murad I advanced to the north and northeast, entering the territory of Bulgaria. Here, however, the conquerors came up against unexpectedly strong resistance put up not so much by the troops of the Tsar as by local commanders of strongholds and by the

population itself. The Ottomans needed more than ten years to traverse the route between Plovdiv and Sofia. The cities of Yambol, Karnobat, Sofia, Bitola, the strongholds in the Rhodope Mountains of Tsepena and Rakovitsa and many others put up particularly strong resistance. Sofia fell in 1382, only after the Turks had managed by deceit to take prisoner Ban Yanuka, the extremely capable leader of its defence. With the hope of preventing the further penetration of the Turks into Bulgaria, Tsar Ivan Shishman became vassal to Murad I.

When the Asian conquerors reached the centre of the Balkans, the rulers of Serbia and Bosnia were frightened and concluded an alliance for joint action against Murad. The united Serbian and Bosnian troops dealt a crushing blow to the Turks in the big battle near the town of Plochnik in 1387. The Bulgarian Tsar joined the Serbo-Bosnian alliance which provoked an immediate wrathful reaction on the part of the Sultan. In 1388 a numerous Turkish army crossed the Balkan Range and conquered almost the whole of Northeastern Bulgaria without the city of Varna. Tsar Shishman was forced to reaffirm his vassal dependence from the Sultan and the terrible Ottoman hordes again set out for Serbia. In a battle which broke out at Kossovo Polé Murad I found his death but the Serbian troops, which had been joined by several Bulgarian feudal lords, were routed. Serbia also fell under vassal dependence from Turkey.

The existence of the Bulgarian state became an obstacle on the way to the Ottomans' further penetration into Central Europe. In spite of its weakness and dependence, it presented a constant threat to the right

flank of the Turkish troops which had penetrated deep into the west. That is why Murad's heir Bayazid I, The Lightning, decided to put an end to the Turnovo Kingdom. In 1393 he invaded Moesia at the head of a numerous army and after a siege which lasted three months, succeeded in capturing Turnovo. One hundred and twenty boyars were massacred in the main church, thousands of Turnovo citizens were taken slaves and Patriarch Evtimi, who had headed the defence of Turnovo until the last moment, was sent into exile to the Rhodopes. Ivan Shishman hid himself in the Danubian stronghold of Nikopol, expecting help from the Hungarian King. The latter, however, never came to his assistance and Nikopol was captured and Ivan Shishman was killed. Only the Vidin Kingdom remained, but a Turkish garrison was also stationed in Vidin.

The Ottomans reached the frontiers of the then powerful Hungarian Kingdom, which forced the Hungarian King Sigismund to prepare in 1396 a big crusade against the Turks. The Ruler of Vidin Ivan Stratsimir opened the gates of his town to the crusaders and joined them with his troops, but the army of the crusaders suffered utter defeat. That was the end also of the Vidin Kingdom.

Bulgaria's fall under Ottoman domination, accompanied by ravaging devastations and cruel massacres of the population, was a veritable catastrophe for the Bulgarian people. The country's political and intellectual élite was destroyed or forced to emigrate. The famous literary centres which had brought glory to Bulgarian mediaeval culture were extinguished. The persecutions were not only national, but also religious. The Bulgarian Orthodox Church was destroyed as a religious institution

and the Moslem religion was proclaimed as official. The majority of Bulgarian towns were depopulated and occupied by the Turkish administration and military garrisons, while the productive Bulgarian population sought refuge in the mountains and remote regions. Thus, the social and economic base of the 14th century cultural renaissance of the Bulgarian people — the flourishing towns — was done away with.

Deprived of its state, cultural and religious institutions, the Bulgarian people were reduced to a Turkish *rayah*, without any rights, cruelly oppressed and exploited by the conquerors. A considerable part of the Bulgarians were forcefully assimilated, and their most fertile lands were taken by compact masses of Turkish colonists. The Ottomans pursued a systematic and purposeful policy of sapping the vitality of the subordinated peoples and enhancing their own national feelings. Thousands of Bulgarian girls were forcefully converted to the Moslem religion and taken into the harems of the Turkish feudal lords (*spahis*, *beys*). An inhuman tax called *devshourmé* was introduced, according to which the healthiest, handsomest and cleverest Bulgarian boys were taken away from their families to special barracks where they were isolated from the outside world and turned into soldiers, excellently schooled and fanatically loyal to Islam. These were the notorious *janissaries* — known for their high military qualities and morale, crack infantry of the Sultan, which sowed terror in the subordinated population and covered the Turkish arms with glory. Some of the most capable *janissaries* rose to the ranks of Turkish dignitaries and military commanders, who contributed a lot to the successes of the Ottoman Empire.

The Bulgarian people proved to be in the worst situation of all peoples conquered by the Ottomans, for they were in the very centre of the boundless Turkish ocean, without any direct links with the free Christian states. The oppressive Turkish domination over the Bulgarian people, which lasted for nearly five centuries in the conditions of the primitive and conservative Moslem state, delayed for centuries the historical development of Bulgaria and deeply wounded the soul of the people. Bulgarian national feeling, however, had struck deep roots. Bulgaria had had a state history spanning more than five hundred years, had reached the heights of an Empire and had passed through two 'Golden Ages' in its cultural development. Such a people, steeled in fierce battles with experienced and powerful enemies, cannot be obliterated even by the cruellest vicissitudes of history.

LIKE THE MIRACULOUS PHOENIX BIRD

During the first three centuries after the annihilation of the Bulgarian state, the Bulgarians were simply crushed by the growing might of the Ottomans, but in spite of everything they never stopped fighting for their national consciousness and liberation. Thousands of courageous patriots like the goldsmith Georgi from Sofia, who was burned at the stake in 1515, preferred the death of a martyr to adopting an alien religion. Avengers of the people – the fearless *haidouks* (rebels) – were roaming the forests, sowing terror among the local Ottoman rulers. The people have preserved in their memory and folk songs the names

of the valient haidouk leaders – *voevodes* (rebel captains) – Manoush, Strahil, Chavdar, Sirma, Boika. The haidouk detachments had their camps in the most out-of-the-way mountain glades and had their green banners with embroidered lions on them – the emblem of the mediaeval Bulgarian state.

Besides this incessant and spontaneous resistance, the Bulgarians also rose in several desperate uprisings – the uprising of Konstantin and Frouzhin in 1403, the two uprisings in Turnovo in 1598 and 1686, and particularly the one in Chiprovtsi and the Karposhev Uprising in 1688 and 1689, which were suppressed with unprecedented brutality and which forced tens of thousands of Bulgarians to leave their native lands and to settle in Banat. The three uprisings, dating from the late 17th century, were connected with the crisis which had begun in the Ottoman Empire and the frequent wars between Austria and Turkey, which gave rise among the Bulgarians to hopes of liberation with the help of Austria. The uprisings had their positive aspects in spite of the suffering they brought in their wake. They kept alive the militant spirit of the Bulgarian people but proved to them that all hopes for liberation with the help of Austria were futile. It became obvious that the Austrian Empire, which itself was oppressing Slav peoples, was pursuing its own selfish goals in the Balkans which had nothing in common with the interests of the enslaved Balkan peoples. The number of Bulgarians turning with hope to the north, to Russia, which was a powerful Slav Eastern Orthodox state, was growing all the time. Russia was irresistibly aspiring for the south, the Black Sea, and was raising ever higher aloft its banner, proclaiming the

defence of the Christians in the Turkish Empire as its noble militant task. The Bulgarian people lovingly called Russia 'Grandfather Ivan' and pinned on her all their hopes for liberation.

As a result of the rapid development of capitalism in Western Europe after the 16th century, the European possessions of the Ottoman Empire were gradually involved in active trade relations with the advanced Western states. This speeded up the development of the new capitalist relations in the Empire. A deep crisis set in in the despotic Turkish feudal system. The numerous Bulgarian artisans mended their finances and gradually expanded their production. Comparatively large-scale workshops mushroomed, and in 1834 Dobri Zhelyazkov built in Sliven the first Bulgarian factory – a factory for woollen fabrics. Alongside the great number of representatives of West-European firms, a large group of rich Bulgarian tradesmen appeared, who had offices in the largest East and Central European trade centres. The annual trade fairs in Sliven and Ouzoundjovo attracted businessmen not only from the Ottoman Empire, but from all over Europe.

The early 18th century marked a patriotic upsurge amid the well-to-do strata of the Bulgarian population, which is characteristic of the birth of every modern nation. Tradesmen, artisans and the municipalities started making generous presents to churches and monasteries. The big Bulgarian monasteries, above all the ones in Mount Athos on the Chalcidice Peninsula, attracted large numbers of pilgrims and donors from all over Bulgaria. Their contacts and meetings consolidated their patriotic feelings and con-



Paissi of Hilendar, painted by Ivan Mrkvichka

fidence in the strength and possibilities of the Bulgarian nation.

The development of the productive forces and the national upsurge, however, collided with the enormous obstacles placed in their way by the despotic feudal system of the Ottoman Empire. By the early 18th century the Empire was already decaying and this decay could not be stopped by any means, so that at the end of the century real chaos reigned in it. The Bulgarian lands became an arena of violent clashes between the army of the Sultan and the troops of the insubordinate local feudal lords. The ravages caused by the internecine wars were worsened by the outrages of the *kurdjalis* – Turkish bandits who were rampant all over the country leaving behind them desolation and death. The government of the Sultan introduced a number of reforms, including an agrarian one, but instead of alleviating the lot of the Bulgarian population they made still heavier their burden of taxes and their harassments on the part of the local Turkish feudal lords and administrators. Even for the smallest services, the corrupt Ottoman officials took large bribes, invaded the homes of the Bulgarians at any time of the day and night, eating and drinking their fill and then demanding payment for having blunted their teeth (*dish-haki* – tooth tax), committed outrages, raped Bulgarian girls and women.

The birth of capitalism in the Bulgarian community and the devastating consequences of the decay of the Ottoman despotic feudal system, which was halting social progress, enhanced the national feeling and patriotism of the Bulgarians and helped the consolidation of the Bulgarian nation. The people of Bulgaria, forgotten by

Europe, were shaking off the ashes of the oppressive foreign yoke and were again coming to life like the miraculous Phoenix bird.

Father Païssi from the town of Bansko, a monk in the Hilendar Monastery on Mount Athos, became the mouthpiece of the intensified national feeling of the people which marked the beginning of the Bulgarian National Revival. After many years of studies, travel and selfless work he wrote his 'Slav-Bulgarian History'. It was written in a simple language, but passionately and was imbued from the first word to the last with ardent patriotism. 'The Slav-Bulgarian History' made of its readers ardent patriots and fighters for national independence. The only manuscript copy of the History was carried around by Païssi himself from one village to another and was copied by hand in several years in scores of copies which, like the secret books of the Bogomils, passed from hand to hand, and were read and reread many times over.

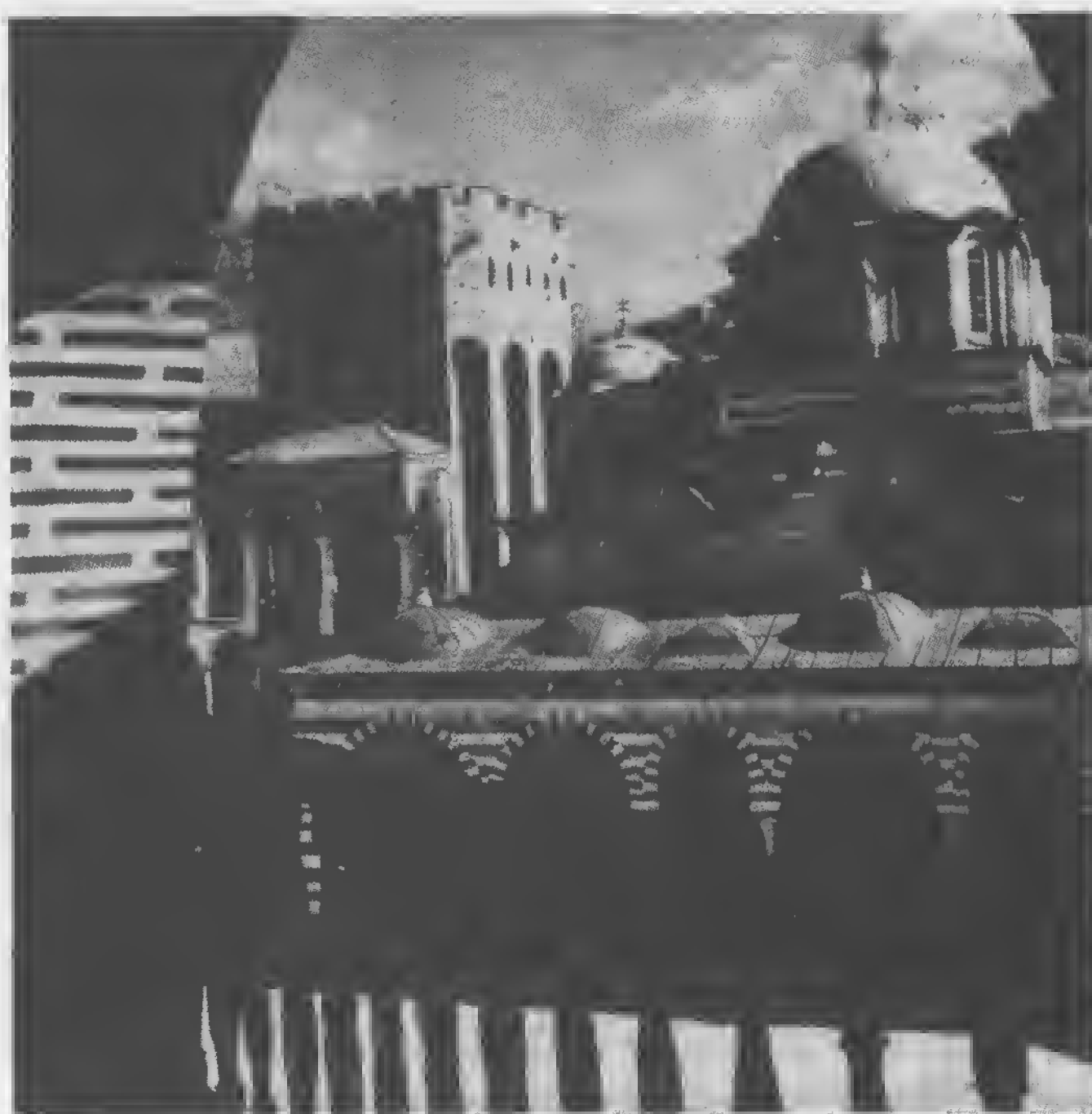
Païssi's great cause had many followers, called 'people's enlighteners'. Most prominent among them were Stoiko Vladislavov (later Bishop Sophronius of Vratsa), Yoakim Kurchovski, Kiril Peichinovich, Neophyte Rilski, Neophyte Bozveli, to mention but a few.

STRUGGLE FOR A BULGARIAN CHURCH AND EDUCATION

During the first half of the 19th century the Bulgarian people having come into contact with civilized Europe, became aware of their age-long backwardness, to which

they had been inevitably doomed by the barbarous foreign domination, and began to strive for more education. Gradually the old monastery schools were replaced by secular ones which taught according to new methods and curricula. Hundreds of selfless teachers, who had dedicated their lives to the cultural upsurge of their people and to the struggle for their liberation, worked side by side

The Rila Monastery



with the outstanding organizers of Bulgarian education Dr Peter Beron and Vassil Aprilov.

Besides the schools, the library clubs – voluntarily established public educational institutions with a wide range of activities – proved very useful in this work. In spite of the great number of obstacles put up by the Ottomans, the number of Bulgarian schools in the 1870s exceeded 1,500, and that of library clubs – 130. The first Bulgarian newspapers and magazines began to come out in the 1840s. It was during those days of national revival that the brightest Bulgarian holiday began to be celebrated, which is celebrated to this day – the Day of Cyril and Methodius, the creators of the Slav alphabet, of Bulgarian education and culture. In 1869 the Bulgarian Literary Society was founded in the Romanian town of Braila, which constituted the foundations of the Bulgarian Academy of Sciences. Modern Bulgarian literature was also making its first steps, represented by the talented writers and poets, loyal to their people, Lyuben Karavelov, Hristo Botev, Vassil Droumev, Konstantin and Dimiter Miladinov, Raiko Zhinsifov, Grigor Purlichev, Naiden Gerov, Dobri Voynikov, Petko Rachov Slaveykov, Ivan Vazov and others. Many of them were also revolutionaries and became recognized ideologists and leaders of the Bulgarian national revolution.

The 19th century marked the flowering of the arts of the Bulgarian National Revival period. The painters Zahari Zograph, Stanislav Dospevski and Nikolai Pavlovich, the wood-carvers from the schools in Debur, Tryavna and Samokov, the self-taught talented master-builder and architect Kolyu Ficheto and thousands of

anonymous masters created immortal works of art which arouse the admiration of the present generations.

Precisely because the rapid development of Bulgarian education was an expression of the intensified patriotism of the Bulgarian people and a valuable means for its consolidation, it was met with rabid resistance on the part of the Greek Patriarchy in Constantinople, which was the exponent of the chauvinistic idea about 'Great Greece'. Almost all bishops and the majority of priests in the bishoprics were of Greek origin. Most of them collaborated with the Turkish authorities, pouring calumnies upon the prominent Bulgarians, insinuating that they were Russia's agents, increased the church taxes and robbed and humiliated their congregations in every possible way. This behaviour of the Greek clergy gave rise to a spontaneous resistance on the part of the Bulgarian population which gradually expanded and grew into an organized attitude.

The Bulgarians were fully justified to speak about a double yoke – Ottoman and Phanariot (from the Phanar city district in Constantinople, where the seat of the Greek Patriarch was) and to put forward demands for a Bulgarian church, independent from the Greek Patriarchy. The struggle was fierce and took its toll. The leaders of the movement for an independent church, Neophyte Bozveli, Ilarion Makariopolski, the brothers Miladinov and many others, were thrown into prison, but no repressions were capable of halting the spiritual progress of a people defending their right to exist as a nation. The Bulgarian population everywhere began to chase away the Greek clergymen from their churches, and on April 3, 1860, during a church

service in Constantinople, Ilarion Makariopolski solemnly proclaimed the separation of the Bulgarian Church from the Greek Patriarchate. Ten years later the government of the Sultan was compelled officially to recognize the existence of a separate Bulgarian Church with an Exarch at its head.

The spiritual upsurge of the Bulgarian nation was accompanied by an upsurge in the armed resistance movement. The successful wars waged by Russia against Turkey during the last three decades of the 18th century had fanned the hopes of the Bulgarian people for a prompt liberation, all the more so that the Russian emperors, who had made the Straits their cherished goal, were increasingly regarding the Balkans as their sphere of influence. Their plans fortunately coincided with the interests of the Balkan people who were in dire need of a powerful ally, capable of breaking the military might of the Ottoman Empire. Thousands of Bulgarian patriots took part in the resistance struggles of Serbs and Greeks, as well as in the wars waged by Russia against Turkey. Scores of thousands of Bulgarians were forced to emigrate in the wake of every Russian military campaign on the Balkans, particularly the one of 1829, in order to save themselves from reprisals. Most of those refugees settled in Russia.

During the Russo-Turkish war of 1828-1829, Georgi Mamarchev, a Bulgarian officer serving in the Russian army, made an attempt to organize a general uprising in Bulgaria, but his attempt failed. The preparations for a mass uprising continued, however, and in 1835 an armed uprising, known under the name of Velcho's Conspiracy, broke out in Turnovo under the leadership of Velcho the

Glazier and Captain Grandfather Nikola. During the same year a spontaneous peasant revolt broke out in North-Western Bulgaria, caused by the refusal of the local authorities to apply the agrarian reform and by their arbitrary actions. This revolt was followed by three uprisings in succession in the same region – in 1836, 1841 and 1850.

The one in 1850 was particularly massive. It was preceded by a secret general meeting of delegates from four districts, which specified the aims of the struggle, the date of the uprising and the way in which they were to proceed. The rebel detachments, led by Tsolo Todorov, Ivan Koulin, Petko Marinov, Purvan Vurbanov, Captain Krustyu and others, numbered a total of some 20,000 men. They blocked the numerous Turkish garrisons in Vidin, Lom and Belogradchik and established control over the villages in the region. The insurgents were routed by the regular troops which were not late in arriving, but the government of the Sultan was forced to take measures for curbing the arbitrariness of the local authorities and *beys*.

ORGANIZED NATIONAL REVOLUTIONARY MOVEMENT

The second half of the 19th century was marked by radical changes in the international situation and in the internal set-up in the Ottoman Empire, which resulted in passing to a higher stage in the struggle of the Bulgarian people for national liberation. A new war broke out between Russia and Turkey in 1853, and since the

previous Russo-Turkish war had brought about the liberation of Greece and Serbia, the Bulgarians cherished hopes that the hour of their freedom too had struck. The ideologist of the Bulgarian national revolution Georgi Stoikov Rakovski set up a 'Secret Society' in Constantinople whose aim was to prepare the Bulgarian people for an uprising when the Russian troops entered the Bulgarian lands. Pavel Gramadov was sent to Macedonia to organize the uprising, Dimitar Petrovich – to North-Western Bulgaria, and Nikola Filipovski – to the Turnovo district.

This time, however, the development of the war proved unfavourable for Russia, for she was forced to fight not only Turkey, but a coalition including France, Britain and the Sardinian Kingdom. This venture, known as the Crimean War, ended in 1856 with Russia's defeat. In its wake Turkey practically became a semi-colony of the big Western capitalist states, which were interested in perpetuating the situation thus created, and made the preservation of the integrity of the Ottoman Empire, called by everyone 'the sick man', the principal aim of their Balkan and Near East policy. A number of reforms were undertaken in order to mitigate the acute national contradictions rending the Empire. The most significant among them was the Hatihumayun, which proclaimed equal rights for all subjects of the Sultan, regardless of their nationality.

The Hatihumayun, like the majority of Ottoman reforms, was never applied. In some respects it even aggravated the plight of the Bulgarians for it provoked the rancour of the chauvinistic and fanatical Turks. In addi-



Georgi S. Rakovski – ideologist and founder of the organized Bulgarian national-revolutionary and liberation movement in the middle of the 19th century

tion to all this, about 100,000 Tartars and Circassians, chased away from Russia after the Crimean War, were allowed to settle in the Bulgarian lands during the 1860s and 1870s. Brutal and embittered, they subjected the Bulgarian population to open pillage and numerous humiliations. A sharp deterioration of the economic situation of the Bulgarian people was added to their national oppression. The influx of cheap and high-quality factory-made goods had a disastrous effect upon Bulgarian handicraft production. The permanent deficit in the state budget led to the imposition of new and heavier taxes, the collection of which was accompanied by monstrous abuse and coercion. In spite of the 15 foreign loans concluded in the course of 20 years, in 1875 the Sultan's government declared bankruptcy. The state was no longer in a position to pay its employees which led to unprecedented corruption.

All this made the further existence of the Bulgarian people (with the exception of an insignificant top crust) under Ottoman domination unendurable and gave a powerful impetus to the Bulgarian national revolution. Two trends became manifest in the Bulgarian national-liberation movement during the second half of the 19th century: an evolutionary and a revolutionary one. The adherents to the evolutionary trend were representatives of the nascent Bulgarian big bourgeoisie, while those adhering to the revolutionary trend were mainly peasants and petty artisans, i. e. the majority of the people. The evolutionaries preached that Bulgaria's liberation would come about by peaceful means, through education, struggles for reforms, or through help from outside. Quoting the experience of

the Austro-Hungarian monarchy, some of them even upheld the idea of establishing a Turko-Bulgaria with the Sultan at its head. The Bulgarian people, however, were hostile to these ideas and regarded the revolutionary struggle as the only way to their salvation.

The initiator of the organized Bulgarian national revolutionary movement was Georgi Stoikov Rakovski. He was born in 1821 in the town of Kotel and was nephew of the ardent Bulgarian patriot Georgi Mamarchev. His parents were rich people and Rakovski received one of the best educations of that time at the Greek school in Constantinople. In 1842 he made an abortive attempt to enter Bulgaria via Romania at the head of an armed detachment. Then he lived in Russia, Serbia and Romania and everywhere he developed energetic journalistic, literary and political activities in favour of the Bulgarian liberation cause. He published the newspapers *Danubian Swan* which came out in French in Belgrade, and *Budushtnost* (The Future) which was published in Bucharest.

The failure of the attempted uprising during the Crimean War had convinced Rakovski that the Bulgarian people had to rely, above all, on themselves. He did not change the strategic plan of the preceding uprisings – namely, the connection between the uprisings and the entry of hostile armed forces into the Empire – but introduced a new content into it: the backbone of the uprising were no longer expected to be the hostile foreign forces, but Bulgarian military detachments, organized and trained abroad. With this aim in view, Rakovski organized in 1861 the so-called First Bulgarian Legion, with the ac-

tive support of the Serbian government. The legion numbered 600 men, fought gallantly, and was able to show its excellent military training and high militant spirit during the armed clashes between the Serbian patriots and the Turkish garrison of the Belgrade fortress in June 1862. The Serbo-Turkish conflict, however, was soon settled peacefully and the legion was disbanded. A detachment headed by the famous voevode Panayot Hitov, which was sent to Bulgaria to do propaganda work in favour of the uprising, was forced to come back to Serbia, whereas a rebel detachment from Turnovo which had taken to the mountains was routed by the Turks.

Rakovski was not discouraged and undertook in 1863 a diplomatic tour with the aim of organizing an alliance of the Balkan peoples against Turkey. Conditions proved to be unfavourable at that time, but three years later, in connection with the outbreak of a major uprising on the Island of Crete, such an alliance was established under Russia's guidance. In Rakovski's absence, a group of Bulgarian emigrants from the liberal bourgeois circles set up a Secret Bulgarian Central Committee with Ivan Kassabov at the head. The Committee signed a 'Sacred Coalition' against Turkey with representatives of the Romanian government. This Coalition, however, proved fruitless because of the prompt settlement of the Romano-Turkish conflict. Then the Secret Committee wrote a memorandum to the Sultan demanding the establishment of a Turko-Bulgarian dualistic monarchy, but the memorandum, of course, was never answered.

Parallel with the Secret Central Committee, a 'Benevolent Society' (Committee of Elders) was also active



Vassil Levski – a great Bulgarian revolutionary and democrat, fighter for national liberation during the third quarter of the 19th century

in Bucharest, consisting of pro-Russian representatives of the Bulgarian bourgeoisie and headed by the rich businessman Hristo Georgiev. Stirred into action by the Russian government, the 'Committee of Elders' started negotiations with the Serbian government for a joint struggle against Turkey and for the establishment, in case of a successful outcome, of a federal Serbo-Bulgarian state — a Yugoslav Kingdom.

Having learned about the activities of the Central Committee and the Committee of Elders, Rakovski returned to Bucharest and started an energetic propaganda against making the Bulgarian national-liberation movement dependent on foreign states' policies. He succeeded in winning over the majority of the emigrants and formed a 'Supreme National Civil Command' which was guided by the principle of sending armed detachments to Bulgaria. In 1867 Rakovski succeeded in preparing two detachments under the leadership of the voevodes Panayot Hitov and Filip Totyu, but his death put an end to his future plans.

After Rakovski's death the initiative again passed into the hands of the Committee of Elders, which agreed with the Serbian government that a special military school was to be set up in Belgrade for 200 Bulgarian youths — the Second Bulgarian Legion. The latter, however, had the fate of the First Legion — it was disbanded only several months later. Most of its members went back to Romania and formed a 125-men-strong detachment, headed by the voevodes Hadji Dimiter and Stefan Karadja. In July 1868, the detachment crossed the Danube and engaged in several bloody battles with the Turks. The last of these

battles took place on Mount Bouzloudja in the Balkan Range and ended in the death of most of the revolutionaries, including the voevode Hadji Dimiter.

The heroic end of this detachment marked the decline of the detachment tactics. It became obvious that these detachments, sent from outside, in spite of their excellent military schooling, heroism and selflessness of their members were incapable of rousing the people in a mass uprising. History had made it imperative for the Bulgarian national-liberation movement to pass over to a new, higher stage of development and this stage was linked with the name of another great son of Bulgaria — Vassil Levski.

Vassil Ivanov Kounchev-Levski was born in 1837 in the town of Karlovo. His father, a poor master-dyer, died early, and Levski had to leave the intermediary school after the second grade. His uncle insisted on his becoming a monk and that is why Levski was also known as 'The Deacon'. The monastery, however, could not satisfy the young man, who wished passionately to devote his life to the national cause. He ran away from the monastery and took part in both of Rakovski's legions, then served as standard-bearer of the detachment of Panayot Hitov and he would have joined the detachment of Hadji Dimiter and Stefan Karadja were it not for his falling gravely ill. Soon after that detachment was defeated, however, Levski returned to Bulgaria, but already as an emissary of the Secret Bulgarian Revolutionary Committee entrusted with the task of studying the situation in the country. A year later he made a second tour of the country, visiting scores of towns and villages and all regions of Bulgaria.

These two tours helped Levski to get a thorough

knowledge of the Bulgarian mentality, to understand the people's aspirations and feelings and, at the same time, to get an insight into his own aspirations and to see ways for achieving Bulgaria's liberation. He became firmly convinced that the rebel detachments could not play the role which Rakovski had expected them to play and that the only way to carry out a successful general uprising was to make careful and thorough preparations for it within the country. Levski did not deny the influence of the international situation and the usefulness of possible help from outside, but he assigned them a secondary role in the Bulgarian national revolution. After his second tour of Bulgaria he tried, in the course of a year, to persuade the most influential representatives of the Bulgarian emigrants of the correctness of his ideas, but failing to do so, he went back to Bulgaria to act according to his convictions.

At that time, the autumn of 1869, the great Bulgarian writer, publicist and revolutionary democrat Lyuben Karavelov arrived in Bucharest. Karavelov was an ardent adherent to the revolutionary methods of struggle. He was born in 1834 in the town of Koprivshtitsa to rich parents, which enabled him to receive one of the best educations at the time — he studied in Russia, where he was deeply influenced by the Russian revolutionary democrats Chernishevsky and Hertzen. In 1867 he settled in Serbia and devoted himself to journalism and public activities. Because of his connections with progressive Serbian circles, he was banished first from Serbia, then from Austro-Hungary and had to settle in Bucharest. There he started publishing the newspaper 'Svoboda' (Freedom) and later 'Nezavissimost' (Independence). These newspapers

turned into rostrums for Bulgarian national-revolutionary and revolutionary-democratic thought. They subjected to sharp criticism the decaying Ottoman Empire, its western supporters, and the well-to-do conservatively-minded circles in Bulgarian society (the *chorbadjis*) who were against the revolutionary methods of struggle. Karavelov, a convinced democrat and internationalist, was ardently favouring the idea of a federation of the Christian Balkan peoples, a federation built on democratic principles.

At the same time when Karavelov was successfully substantiating and propagating the national-revolutionary ideology among the Bulgarian emigrants in Romania, Levski was giving proof of his brilliant qualities of a revolutionary organizer. He was modest and extremely charismatic, with an iron will, daring and inventive, fanatically faithful to his people, and his name became a legend, while he was still alive. In three years only he established a dense network of secret revolutionary committees throughout the country. This is what Levski wrote in a letter to one of his followers: 'We are dying to see our native land free, and after that – come what may'. When he was asked what he would become after the liberation, he answered simply that he would go to some other country to fight for the liberation of other enslaved peoples.

Strict conspiracy was the rule in the work of the internal revolutionary organization. The members of the committees did not know each other's real names but used aliases. A courier service was functioning with amazing accuracy between the committees, and there was also a committee secret police to watch over the activities of the committees and to gather intelligence about the enemy.

The newly-recruited members of the committees swore allegiance to the organization and Bulgaria late at night at the twinkling light of a candle over a revolver and a dagger crossed over a Bible. The leading organ of the internal revolutionary organization was called 'Provisional Bulgarian Government' and later — Bulgarian Central Revolutionary Committee. Its seat was in the town of Lovech, hidden at the northern foothill of the Balkan Range. The means for the purchase of arms and ammunition came from voluntary donations but the wealthy Bulgarians who refused to cooperate were subjected to revolutionary reprisals.

Levski was not only an unsurpassed organizer of the Bulgarian national revolution, but its ideologist as well. Although he was not one of the educated Bulgarian revolutionaries, he had the advantage of a thorough knowledge of his people's problems, a clever mind and political realism. This is how he specified the goal of the forthcoming struggles in the Statute of the revolutionary organization: 'A common revolution should transform radically the present despotic-tyrannical system and should exchange it for a democratic republic (popular government).' The statute worked out by Levski was approved by the general meeting convened in Bucharest in the spring of 1872. It was decided that the form of the future government should be decided by the people itself after the liberation, but Levski had a categorical opinion on this issue: 'A pure and sacred republic'.

The Bulgarian national-revolutionary movement was characterized by its democratic and popular nature. It was alien to all forms of chauvinism and was imbued with



*Hristo Botev – a great poet and revolutionary, fighter
for Bulgaria's national liberation*

profound respect for the other peoples, including the Turkish people. The Bulgarian national-revolutionaries solemnly declared in their programme that they were 'not rising against the Turkish people, but against the Turkish government', that they considered as 'friends all peoples and nations which are sympathetic with our sacred cause' and that they wanted 'to live in peace with the neighbouring Balkan people and to establish together with them a democratic Balkan federation.'

Levski returned to Bulgaria immediately after the closure of the general meeting in Bucharest, as a representative of the newly-elected Central Committee, which was headed by Lyuben Karavelov. At the year's end, however, after the Turkish post office in the Arabakonak Pass was raided and robbed, something about which Levski had had no previous knowledge and which was organized by his adventure-seeking and stubborn deputy Dimiter Obshti, the Turkish authorities started arrests among the activists of the revolutionary organization. Levski was wanted by the Turkish authorities, but he cared little about his personal safety and with a selflessness characteristic of him he set about saving what he could. He went to Lovech where he intended to hide the archives of the organization, but he was betrayed by a member of the Lovech committee — Priest Krustyu, and was seized at the Kukrina Inn on the road between Lovech and Sevlievo.

The leader of the Bulgarian national revolution behaved with dignity and courage before the Turkish court in Sofia. He never betrayed a single name, took all the responsibility on himself and defended the right of the Bulgarian people to fight for their national liberation. The

Apostle of Freedom rejected on several occasions the demand of the court to tell about his activities and to beg for mercy from the padishah. On February 6 (19) 1873, he was hanged near Sofia, but he has remained for ever in his people's memory.

Levski's death was a severe blow to the Bulgarian national revolutionary movement, but soon another prominent figure stood out in this movement — that of the poet of genius and revolutionary Hristo Botev. Botev was born in 1847 in the town of Kalofer at the foot of the Balkan Range. He was the son of a well-known teacher and functionary of the National Revival period Botyu Petkov. He studied in Odessa, Russia, as a scholarship student of the Odessa Society — a society set up by rich Bulgarian merchants. He moved in progressive circles and studied avidly the world of the Russian revolutionary democrats. The rich merchants from the Odessa Society did not like this and in the second year at school they took his scholarship away. He stayed in Russia for another year as teacher in the Bessarabian village of Zadunaevka and returned to his native Kalofer in 1867. There he taught while his father was away, but the speech he made on the Day of Bulgarian Letters forced him to leave Bulgaria immediately, for otherwise he would have been arrested. Thus he joined the Bulgarian emigrants in Bucharest and devoted himself entirely to his people's liberation.

In 1871 in the town of Braila Botev began to publish the newspaper *Duma na Bulgarskite emigranti* (The Word of the Bulgarian Emigrants), in which he displayed his brilliant qualities of a publicist and revolutionary. In 1872 he moved to Bucharest and together with Lyuben

Karavelov worked in the organ of the Bulgarian Revolutionary Central Committee. He published on his own the satirical newspaper *Budilnik* (The Clarion Call). The genius of Hristo Botev soon placed him on top of Bulgarian national-revolutionary and revolutionary-democratic thought. He shared the utopian socialist ideas of the Russian revolutionary democrats, but he was also aware and pointed out the growing role of the social forces which the development of capitalism was pushing to the fore. Although he never became a scientific socialist, he had read 'Das Kapital' and hailed enthusiastically the Paris Commune. 'Only the reasonable and fraternal alliance of the peoples,' Botev wrote, 'is in a position to do away with the sufferings, poverty and parasites of humankind and such an alliance alone is in a position to establish genuine freedom, fraternity, equality and happiness in the world'. His 'Credo' of the Bulgarian Commune' is yet more categorical: 'I believe in the joint common strength of mankind on earth, capable of doing good... In the bright and life-giving spirit of reason, strengthening the hearts and souls of all people for the success and triumph of communism through a revolution.'

Botev shared the concepts of Karavelov and Levski as regards the tasks and goals of the Bulgarian national-liberation movement and developed them further. He was even more convincing in teaching that the Bulgarian people should rely, above all, on their own forces for the achievement of national liberation. Botev supported the idea of a Balkan federation, but added that it could be carried out, not by negotiations between the existing

bourgeois-monarchic governments, but through a fraternal agreement of the free Balkan peoples.

At the end of 1874, Botev began to publish the newspaper *Znamé* (Banner) with the aim of uniting the forces of the Bulgarian national-revolutionary movement which had been dispersed after Levski's death. When an uprising broke out in Bosna and Herzegovina in June 1875, Botev took the initiative for the election of a new Central Committee. The Central Committee, headed by Botev, started feverish preparations for an uprising which was to break out that very same autumn, but the task proved too much for the Committee. Only the district of Stara Zagora attempted a more serious revolt which was promptly put down by the authorities.

THE APRIL EPOPEE (1876)

After the suppression of the uprising in Stara Zagora, a new Central Committee was formed in the Romanian town of Giurgiu. The country was divided into four revolutionary districts, with chief voevodes at the head of each, called Apostles. The Apostles and their assistants arrived in the districts assigned to them as early as the beginning of 1876, and immediately got down to work. They were all young and capable men, selflessly devoted to their motherland, who saw the meaning of their life solely in the struggle for Bulgaria's liberation. They toured the country tirelessly, restored the former revolutionary committees and set up new ones, supplied arms, carried out

mass propaganda about the need of an uprising, trained the members of the Committees in the art of war.

The Panagyurishtë (Fourth) and Turnovo (First) revolutionary districts were best prepared for the uprising. The Apostle of the Panagyurishtë revolutionary district was Panayot Volov, who subsequently voluntarily gave up his leadership in favour of Georgi Benkovski, his first assistant, who imposed himself with his inexhaustible energy, strong will, resolve and outstanding qualities of an organizer. Almost the entire population in the district took part in the preparation of the uprising. The people sold their land and livestock in order to buy arms, women were sewing uniforms for the insurgents and were embroidering banners, baking rusks and making cartridges for their rifles. Secret mobilization lists were drawn up, a detailed plan of action was mapped out. On April 14, 1876, a national assembly was convened in the Oborishtë locality in the mountains, not far from Panagyurishtë, which was attended by 56 representatives of the secret committees in the district and by over 200 assistants and armed guards.

On Benkovski's proposal the meeting decided that the uprising should break out on May 1, but the developments forced the hand of the insurgents. The Turkish authorities learned about the meeting in Oborishtë and sent gendarmes to Panagyurishtë and Koprivshtitsa to arrest the organizers. The chairman of the revolutionary committee in Koprivshtitsa Todor Kableshkov had to escape and after a short meeting the committee took the decision that the uprising should start immediately. The quiet town in the mountains was shaken by gun shots and the alarm of ringing church bells. The streets were filled with young

men in insurgents' uniforms. The police headquarters were taken by storm and soon the red and green banner of the insurgents with an enraged lion embroidered on it with the words 'Freedom or Death' underneath was fluttering over it. A messenger was sent immediately on horseback to Panagyurishtë carrying the celebrated 'letter signed in blood' from the insurgents in Koprivshtitsa to the committee in Panagyurishtë.

The letter gave rise to indescribable enthusiasm in Panagyurishtë. Benkovski gave out the order to start the uprising immediately. In only several minutes power passed over into the hands of the insurgents. The detachment of Turkish gendarmes sent to Panagyurishtë to arrest the revolutionary committee was put to flight. The local schoolmistress Raina Popgeorgieva, whom the people called Princess Raina, joined the insurgents dressed in their uniform, on horseback, holding aloft the banner she herself had sewn and embroidered. The whole town gathered in the square to listen to Benkovski's fiery speech. A provisional government was formed with the prominent citizen of Panagyurishtë Pavel Bobekov at the head. Couriers set out from the centre of the uprising, Panagyurishtë, for all the villages in the district and for the other revolutionary districts with the long-awaited news and appeal to rise at once in an armed uprising. Benkovski himself assembled some 200 armed mounted insurgents who formed his legendary 'flying detachment' and led them on a tour of the villages to inspire and organize the people.

The fire of the uprising spread to almost all towns and villages in the district and in the cities of Plovdiv and

Pazardjik, where numerous Turkish garrisons were stationed. The insurgents fought bravely but the forces of the enemy were superior. The entire might of the Empire was sent against their old rifles and wooden cannons made of cherry-tree trunks. The insurgent towns and villages fell one after another into the hands of the bashibozouks (irregular armed Turkish hordes) and of the regular forces, armed with most up-to-date weapons. After three days of fierce battles, on April 30, the Turks entered Panagyurishtë, which was set on fire by the artillery. All inhabitants, mainly old men and women with small children, who had not managed to run away and hide in the mountains, were massacred. The same fate befell the towns of Klissoura, Strelcha and scores of other settlements in the Sredna Gora mountains. The leaders of the uprising, together with small groups of insurgents, tried to escape to Romania, but most of them fell in ambushes along the long road: Benkovski was killed not far from Teteven, Volov — near the town of Byala. Kableshkov was captured and committed suicide in prison.

The atrocities committed by the bashibozouks in the Fourth revolutionary district in the Rhodope Mountains were still uglier. After several days of fighting bashibozouks and regular troops entered the large village of Peroushtitsa. Hundreds of insurgents and townspeople took position in the church and continued their desperate resistance. When the Turkish artillery began to demolish the church walls, the members of the local committee Kocho Chistemenski and Spas Ginev killed their wives and children, not to allow them to fall into the hands of the Turks, and then committed suicide. Their example was

followed by other insurgents. The church and school which were full of people, were set on fire and hundreds of villagers found their death of martyrs in the flames.

The fate of the village of Batak, situated still further within the mountain, was still more terrible. The fierce bashibozouks of the blood-thirsty Ahmed Aga Barutinli massacred the entire population: some 4, 000 people – men, women, old people, children were slain. The walls of the old stone church have preserved to this day the blood stains and traces of the fire, and the museum in Batak houses the chopping logs on which the heads of the defenceless victims were cut off. The bodies of the fighters for Bulgaria's freedom were left unburied. The once flowering village was reduced to rubble and remained for a long time haunted by vultures and ravens.

Bratsigovo was the only one among the insurgent villages in the Rhodopes which survived. The insurgents there were successful in repelling the attacks of the bashibozouks and laid down their arms only after the uprising had been put down everywhere else. The leader of the Bratsigovo insurgents Vassil Petleshkov was tortured between two fires to tell the names of his associates, but he preferred death to treason.

The most active villages in the Turnovo revolutionary district were Batoshevo, Novo Selo, Kruvenik, Byala Cherkva, Moussina, Vishovgrad, Dichin, Golyamo Yalaré. The leaders of the uprising there were Tsanko Dyustabanov, Father Hariton, Bacho Kiro Petrov, Yonko Karagyozev, Todor Kirkov and others. After several bloody battles, the biggest of which took place on Mount Maragidik in the Balkan Range, the insurgents were

routed by the severalfold more numerous Turkish troops. The detachment led by Priest Hariton fortified itself in the Dryanovo Monastery and repelled the attacks of bashibozouks and regular troops for nine long days. When their ammunition ended, they undertook a midnight attack. The majority of the insurgents perished in the hand-to-hand fighting and only 40 out of the 200 insurgents managed to escape. There, too, the Turks committed inhuman atrocities, razing scores of villages to the ground and slaughtering their population.

The epilogue of the April epopée was the exploit of Botev's detachment. As soon as he heard about the uprising, Botev recruited a detachment of 200 courageous revolutionaries and took Nikola Voinikovski, who has served in the Russian army, for his military adviser. On May 17, 1876, disguised as ordinary market-gardeners, the revolutionaries, divided in groups, boarded the Austrian packetboat Radetzki at different Romanian ports on the Danube. When the boat approached the village of Kozlodoui on the Bulgarian bank, the 'market-gardeners' changed quickly into their uniforms of dapper revolutionaries and took possession of the boat, forcing the crew to enable them to disembark on the Bulgarian bank. As soon as Botev and his comrades descended on the bank, they kneeled down before the admiring eyes of the passengers and piously kissed the soil they had come to shed their blood for. From there the detachment set out for the Balkan Range, but the uprising had already been quelled, whereas the Vratsa district had not risen at all. After several fierce battles with the far superior Turkish forces, the detachment reached the Balkan Range near the

town of Vratsa (Mounts Kamarata, Koupena and Okolchitsa near the Peak Vola) where it was surrounded on all sides by Turkish troops. Throughout the day on May 20, the revolutionaries kept repelling the attacks of the Turkish infantry and Circassian cavalry. When evening fell and the battle was already ending, a fatal bullet pierced Botev's heart. In order to make their escape easier, the detachment broke into small groups and thus ended its existence as a military unit.

LIBERATION

The glorious April 1876 Uprising of the Bulgarian people ended in defeat, but it became a prelude to the people's liberation. In the summer and early autumn of 1876 the Bulgarian question became the central issue in the long drawn-out Eastern Question — that about the destiny of the Balkan peoples enslaved by Turkey and about the fate of the Ottoman Empire itself. In spite of their close proximity to the Ottoman capital and the fact that they lived on the crossroads of the Empire's vital arteries among compact masses of Turkish colonists, the Bulgarians had had the courage to rise in a desperate, resolute struggle to overthrow the unbearable foreign rule. This earned them the sympathy and admiration of the other European nations.

The Turkish authorities did their best to obliterate all traces of their inhuman atrocities in crushing the uprising, but the traces were so numerous and so horrible that even

the little which was seen by foreign diplomats and journalists was sufficient to arouse the profound indignation of world democratic public opinion. Knyaz Tseretelev, Russia's vice-consul in Plovdiv, Eugene Schuyler, secretary of the United States embassy in Constantinople, and J. MacGahan, special correspondent of the British paper *Daily News*, undertook in early July, i. e. two months after the uprising, an investigation in the regions of Southern Bulgaria, which had risen.

"What we saw there (Batak)", MacGahan wrote, "was too frightful for more than a hasty glance... It was a fearful sight — a sight to haunt one through life. There were little curly heads there in that festering mass, crushed down by heavy stones... little baby hands stretched out as if for help; babies that had died wondering at the bright gleam of sabres and the red hands of the fierce-eyed men who wielded them; children who had died shrinking with fright and terror; young girls who had died weeping and sobbing and begging for mercy; mothers who died trying to shield their little ones with their own weak bodies. all lying there together, festering in one horrid mass."

The atrocities committed in Bulgaria became the most popular subject tackled by the European press. More than 200 prestigious newspapers and magazines from all over Europe in some 3, 000 articles and reports gave coverage of the bloody events in Bulgaria. Besides the above-mentioned investigators, most helpful for the cause of Bulgaria were Edwin Piers, the Constantinople correspondent of the *Daily News*, the French consuls in Sofia and Plovdiv Le Gay and D'Istria, Emil de Girardin, editor in the *La France* newspaper, Ives de Woestin, correspondent

of *Le Figaro*, the Italian consuls in Sofia and Plovdiv Vito Positano and Takela, to mention but a few.

A powerful movement in defence of the Bulgarian people who had proved with their own blood that they were worthy of living in freedom, was set afoot in a number of countries. This movement acquired the greatest dimensions in Russia. The 'Otechestvennyé Zapiski' magazine wrote: 'No one here would think, listen, speak or read about anything but the developments on the other side of the Danube'. As the great Bulgarian historian Professor Marin Drinov, who was working at that time in Kharkov, wrote, Russia was shaken 'by one of those movements which involve the whole Russian people only at the greatest moments of their historical life.'

The conservative government of Disraeli was benevolently neutral with regard to Turkey during the uprising, which determined the widespread movement in defence of the Bulgarian people in Britain. More than 250 meetings were held throughout the country and hundreds of telegrams of protest were addressed to the government. The leader of the opposition, Liberal Party William Gladstone, made scores of speeches and published in a mass circulation the booklets 'The Bulgarian Horrors and the Eastern Question' and 'Lessons in Slaughtering'. Relief funds were collected to help the Bulgarian population. Particularly active in this campaign was Lady Strangford, who had visited Bulgaria.

The movement in defence of the Bulgarians developed in a number of other countries, too: Romania, Czechoslovakia, France, Italy, Croatia, Germany. Girardin's pamphlet 'Europe's Disgrace', published in France,

went through several printings. The brightest minds of the epoch — Darwin, Victor Hugo, Tolstoy, Turgenev, Nekrassov, Dostoyevsky, Mendeleev, Sechenov, Garibaldi and many others spoke ardently in defence of the Bulgarian people. On August 29, 1876 the great writer and humanist Victor Hugo pronounced his celebrated speech

*The defence of the Shipka pass in the Balkan Range,
painted by Professor Iliya Petrov*



in the French Parliament, calling upon the governments to take measures to put an end to the sufferings of the heroic Bulgarian people.

Thus the categoric resolve of the Bulgarian people to win their liberty and the powerful world movement in their defence finally forced European diplomacy to place the

Welcoming the Russian troops in Bulgaria, an old engraving from the same epoch



Bulgarian question on the agenda. On Russia's initiative, a conference was convened in Constantinople in December 1876 of the ambassadors of the Great Powers to discuss the situation on the Balkans after the suppression of the uprisings in Bulgaria, Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia's defeat in the war with Turkey in the summer of 1876. The situation was favourable for the Bulgarians. On the one hand, the powerful movement in defence of the Bulgarian people had forced Russia to give up its post-Crimean policy of restraint from taking decisive steps on

The monument on Mount Shipka



the Balkan problems and, on the other, it had paralyzed the actions of the champions of the *status quo*, of the Ottoman Empire among the British and French ruling circles. In spite of British and Austro-Hungarian resistance, the conference decided to grant autonomy not only to Bosnia and Herzegovina, but to Bulgaria as well, within her recognized ethnical boundaries: Moesia, Thrace and Macedonia. The apprehensions of the British and Austro-Hungarian ruling circles that Russia's influence might become too pronounced, imposed a compromise at the expense of the Bulgarian people: it was decided to found two, instead of one state — eastern Bulgaria with Turnovo for capital, and western Bulgaria with Sofia for its centre.

Encouraged by its military successes and counting on the lack of unanimity between the Great Powers, the Ottoman government rejected the decisions of the ambassadorial conference. After having thus exhausted all diplomatic means, Russia declared war on Turkey on April 12 (25), 1877. Soon after that Romania also joined the war on Russia's side. The military operations took place in the Caucasus and in the Balkans, but the Balkan front was the more important of the two, for the main forces of the belligerent countries were concentrated here where the decisive battles took place.

The Bulgarian people welcomed the news about the declaration of the war with indescribable enthusiasm. In the very first few days more than 7,500 Bulgarian volunteers appeared at the head-quarters of the Russian Army. They were organized in 6 battalions under the command of General Stoletov. Another 6 battalions were formed in the course of the military operations, when

scores of Bulgarian detachments started operating within the Turkish rear, and thousands of Bulgarian scouts rendered invaluable services to the Russian military intelligence. The whole Bulgarian nation was in the service of the Russian army. The Russian soldiers were welcome guests in every Bulgarian home and the population started building fortifications and roads, provided the army with horses and other animals, showed the ways, organized field hospitals.

The first Russian units crossed the Danube at the town of Svishtov on June 15 (28), 1877 and moved quickly to the interior of the country. The Turks, however, had a strong army at their disposal and by the end of July, after fierce battles near Stara Zagora, Pleven and Byala, they managed to halt the advance of the Russians. The talented Turkish commander Osman Pasha concentrated an army of 40,000-strong in the Pleven stronghold, while Syuleiman Pasha was advancing from Bosnia and Herzegovina with a still more numerous army. The Russian vanguard commanded by General Gurko withdrew to Northern Bulgaria, leaving the necessary men to guard the strategically more important mountain passes along the way. The Shipka Pass, through which ran the best road to Turnovo and Pleven, was left to be defended by a mixed Bulgarian and Russian detachment under the leadership of General Stoletov. It became the arena of epic fights from August 9 till 11, in which both Russians and Bulgarians displayed miraculous bravery. When their ammunition came to an end, they began to hurl rocks and boulders at the numerically superior fanatically advancing enemy, trees and even the dead bodies of their fallen comrades.

Syuleiman Pasha failed to take the Pass and this decided the outcome of the war.

After a siege which lasted several months, Osman Pasha attempted on November 28 to break his way to Sofia, but without success and was forced to capitulate. After the victory at Plevna, won under unbelievably hard conditions – winter blizzards, benumbing cold spells and snow-ridden mountain paths – the Russian troops crossed the Balkan Range, broke quickly the resistance of the Turkish army and reached the capital of the Ottoman Empire. On February 19 (March 3), 1878, the government of the Sultan was forced to sign a peace treaty in the town of San Stefano on the coast of the Sea of Marmara. The treaty envisaged complete independence for Serbia, Romania and Montenegro and the setting up of an autonomous Bulgarian state. The hope of the Bulgarian people that Grandfather Ivan would set them free had come true. Russia paid for the freedom of Bulgaria with the life of 200,000 of her sons and gained in return the eternal love and gratitude of the Bulgarian people.

AGAINST THE INIQUITY OF BERLIN

The happiness of the Bulgarian people at their freedom, won at the price of incalculable sufferings and victims, was soon darkened. The ruling circles of Britain and Austro-Hungary were apprehensive that the newly-created Bulgarian state would become a bridgehead of expanding Russian influence on the Balkan Peninsula and for placing the Straits under Russia's control. They in-

sisted on convening in June 1878 in Berlin a congress of the Great Powers whose decisions proved fatal for the future of the Balkans, and not only of the Balkan peoples. The Russian government was forced to sign on July 1 (13) 1878 the so-called Treaty of Berlin, which was a revision of the Treaty of San Stefano. Instead of a united Bulgarian state within its uncontested ethnical borders, it set up a Bulgarian Principality, including only Moesia and the region of Sofia. Southern Bulgaria became an autonomous region within the framework of the Ottoman Empire, under the name of Eastern Rumelia, while Macedonia retained its pre-war *status quo*, i. e. the Bulgarian population there remained under Ottoman domination. Bosnia and Herzegovina, which had shed rivers of blood for their liberation from Turkish yoke, were included within the frontiers of Austria-Hungary — a compulsive ‘present’ on the part of the Sultan to the Austro-Hungarian Emperor for the latter’s support in Berlin. Britain’s ‘present’ was the Island of Cyprus.

Thus, because of the intertwined interests of the Great Powers, a just liberation cause was buried and the beginning was laid of future mutual rivalries and internecine wrangles which cost the Balkan peoples incalculable sufferings and rivers of blood... The French historians Lavissee and Rambeault were fully justified in writing in vol. 5 their *General History*: “In San Stefano Russia was preoccupied with the question of granting freedom to all Christians. In Berlin they never took into account either justice, or the will of the peoples, common sense, common interest. The final result was a monument to egotism, to envy, to personal relations, a base and im-

moral act, because, far from securing peace, it created numerous occasions for future conflicts and wars.'

Separated from the Adriatic Sea, having lost vast territories (Bosnia and Herzegovina) Serbia was forced to look for an outlet on the sea to the south, through Bulgarian lands, along the valley of the River Vardar, towards Salonika. This, of course, pitted the two fraternal peoples, Bulgarians and Serbians, against each other, making them fly at each other's throat. Greece, for her part, was interested in opposing Serbia's and Bulgaria's penetration towards Salonika by expanding its hinterland, i. e. by seizing the undisputed until then Bulgarian region of Macedonia. Thus the rivalry between the Great European Powers and their selfish interests gave birth at the Berlin Congress to the notorious Macedonian question.

The Berlin diktat provoked a storm of indignation throughout the Bulgarian lands. *Edinstvo* (Unity) committees were set up both in the Principality and in Eastern Rumelia, whose aim was the restoration of the unity of the broken up Bulgarian nation by preparing an uprising in Macedonia. The consuls and ambassadors of the Great Powers were showered with protests. Fearing complications, the Ottoman government gave up its right granted it by the Treaty of Berlin, of maintaining garrisons in Eastern Rumelia. A Bulgarian in the service of the Ottoman Empire was appointed Governor of Eastern Rumelia – Aleko Bogoridi. In October the Kresna-Razlog uprising broke out under the leadership of Dimitar Popgeorgiev in north-eastern Macedonia, which neighboured on the Principality. Hundreds of Bulgarians from the country's interior fought shoulder to shoulder

with the insurgents, as well as democrats and internationalists from other countries. The uprising was suppressed after two months of bloody battles. Fearing the reprisals of the Turkish authorities, thousands of Bulgarians from Macedonia sought refuge in the Principality of Bulgaria.

The defeat of the uprising did not discourage the Bulgarian patriots. It only convinced them that only a long and serious preparation would make the outcome successful. In late 1884 and early 1885 a number of Bulgarian emigrants from Macedonia and former insurgents of the April 1876 Uprising, with the eminent writer and publicist Zahari Stoyanov at the head, began to set up secret committees, whose aim was the unification of Macedonia and Eastern Rumelia with the Principality of Bulgaria through a mass popular uprising. It was decided that the committee in the city of Plovdiv should be the central one under the name of 'Secret Bulgarian Central Revolutionary Committee' (SBCRC). The ruling bourgeois circles of the Principality gained the upper hand in the Committee, and they were in favour of cautious actions. It was decided to start with the annexation of Eastern Rumelia to the Principality, as it was an easier and more feasible task, due to the lack of Turkish troops there. On September 6, 1885 units of the Bulgarian militia, led by the officers Danaïl Nikolaev and Raicho Nikolov, seized the state power in Eastern Rumelia, assisted by a rebel detachment from the Plovdiv region under the command of the non-commissioned officer Prodan Tishkov-Chardafon, and thus Eastern Rumelia was united with the Principality. The population was jubilant. Spontaneous



Gotse Delchev — continuator of the work of Levski and Botev, fighter for the liberation of Macedonia and Thrace

rallies and demonstrations took place all over the country, while the troops of the Principality started for the Turkish border, firmly resolved to defend the unification. Complications, however, came from the least expected quarter.

Dissatisfied with the fact that the unification had been carried out without its consent, and suspicious of the Bulgarian Prince Alexander Battenberg having acted on the advice of Austria-Hungary which was anxious to make things difficult for Russia in the Balkans, the Russian government demonstratively withdrew its officers from the Bulgarian army. Instigated by Austria-Hungary and under the pretext that the unification of Eastern Rumelia and the Principality of Bulgaria had changed the balance of forces on the Balkans, the King of Serbia Milan ordered his troops to enter Bulgaria on November 2, 1885. This fratricidal and obviously unjust war, however, was extremely unpopular among the Serbian people and had a negative effect on the morale in the Serbian army, while the perfidy of King Milan provoked an unprecedented patriotic upsurge among the Bulgarian people. In a surprisingly short time, considered as impossible by many foreign military advisers, the main forces of the Bulgarian army were transferred from the Turkish to the Serbian border, i. e. from one end of the country to the other. It took them only three days to make the most difficult 135-km long march from the Belovo railway station where the southern Bulgarian railway line ended at the time, to the border.

The decisive battle took place near the town of Slivnitsa, 40 km away from Sofia, and ended in the total defeat

of the Serbian army. The Bulgarian army then crossed the border, took Pirot and started for Nis. Its further advance was stopped by emissaries from Vienna who declared that if Bulgaria did not put an end to the military operations she would have to fight the Austro-Hungarian army. The Peace Treaty was signed on February 19, 1886 in Bucharest. It restored the pre-war Serbo-Bulgarian frontier and its main result was the reaffirmation of the unification between the Principality of Bulgaria and Eastern Rumelia.

Thus, the first stage of the unification of the Bulgarian nation ended in success and the country invested all its efforts in the implementation of the next stage – the liberation of Macedonia, Aegean and Adrianople Thrace. This task, however, was far more complex and difficult to carry out for a number of reasons. The existence of a large Bulgarian state within its natural ethnical borders was not to the liking either of the neighbouring Balkan states, which were afraid of a Bulgarian hegemony on the Balkans, or of the Great Powers which had engineered the Treaty of Berlin and regarded Bulgaria as the bridgehead of Russian penetration of the Mediterranean region. Besides, there was a large Turkish population of the not yet liberated parts of the country. In Macedonia, for instance, the Bulgarians formed two-thirds of the population, whereas the remaining part consisted of Turks, Wallachians and some other minorities. The liberation of Macedonia and the above-mentioned parts of Thrace was also complicated by the near-sighted adventurist policy of the Bulgarian ruling circles and by the lamentable circumstance that the Bulgarian throne was ascended in 1887

by the power-loving, vain and venturesome Austro-Hungarian agent, Ferdinand of Saxe Coburg-Gotha.

The complicated internal and international conditions in which the liberation movement of Thrace and Macedonia was placed, was reflected on its overall organization and development. The fact that the Bulgarian state could not carry out the unification by force made necessary the appearance of a powerful national-revolutionary organization in the regions still under foreign yoke, an organization which was to prepare the people for a general uprising. Previous experience was extremely helpful in this respect, and the Bulgarian patriots in Thrace and Macedonia availed themselves directly of the traditions of the internal revolutionary organization of the time of Levski, developing it further, of course, in compliance with the concrete actual needs and conditions.

Thus in 1893 Damyan Grouev, Hristo Tatarchev and others laid the foundations in Salonika of the Internal Macedonian and Adrianople Revolutionary Organization. In the following year Gotse Delchev joined the central leadership of the organization and soon became the recognized leader of the national-liberation movement in Macedonia and the Adrianople region. The activities of the organization were guided by the democratic and internationalist ideas of Karavelov, Levski and Botev and the influence of scientific socialism was strongly felt in it. Many of the leaders, with Nikola Karev at the head, were socialists, while Gotse Delchev himself had read socialist literature and had associated with socialists during his study at the Sofia Military School. The founders of the revolutionary organization came from among the people,

were alien to bourgeois chauvinism and had republican convictions. That is why they followed their own path and had all the reasons not to trust the Bulgarian monarch and his obedient governments.

The Statutes of the Bulgarian Macedonian and Adrianople Committees (BMAC) adopted after the 1890 congress held in Salonika read in part, that 'Every Bulgarian regardless of sex can become member of the organization provided he had not previously disgraced himself by some dishonest or anti-social act' and who would 'fight for the freedom of the Bulgarians in Macedonia and the Adrianople region'. In order not to give rise to prejudices against itself on the part of the non-Bulgarian population in Macedonia and the region of Adrianople, the organization dropped the adjective 'Bulgarian' from its name and was re-named Internal Macedonian and Adrianople Revolutionary Organization (IMARO). Being aware of the fact that the Great Powers and the neighbouring states would not allow the unification of Thrace and Macedonia with the Bulgaria Principality, the IMARO leaders raised the slogan of autonomy with a view to repeating what had happened with Eastern Rumelia – to achieve a unification with the Principality at an opportune moment.

The ruling bourgeois circles in Bulgaria were distrustful of the IMARO, which is easily explicable in view of its democratic principles. That is why they opposed the setting up in 1894 in Sofia of a Supreme Macedonian and Adrianople Committee. Relations between the two committees were strained but their common goal – the liberation of the Bulgarians in Thrace and Macedonia – often

brought them together and they acted in close cooperation. While the Supreme Committee was in favour of sending armed detachments aimed at creating constant tensions in the two regions and thus keeping the attention of European diplomacy on the alert with regard to the unsettled Bulgarian national question, IMARO was systematically and purposefully preparing the people for a general uprising. A dense network of secret revolutionary committees was built up in both regions, arms were supplied and military training was organized. In spite of the courage and selflessness of the detachments sent by the Supreme Committee, in most of the cases the objective results from their actions were negative – they caused cruel reprisals on the part of the Turkish authorities against the civilian Bulgarian population and brought about betrayals of the conspiracy inside the Internal Revolutionary Organization. Characteristic in this respect was the uprising in Gorna Djumaya in 1902, whose suppression was accompanied by horrible atrocities, which brought about the routing of many of the secret committees and strengthened the vigilance and alertness of the Turkish authorities. The probability of disclosures in the remaining parts of Macedonia and Thrace tilted the balance of forces within the organization in favour of its more impatient members who insisted on speeding up the proclamation of the general uprising which had not been well prepared.

At the height of the preparations, on May 4, 1903, Gotse Delchev was killed in an unequal battle with a Turkish posse which had surrounded him in the village of Banitsa, Seres district (now in Greece). On the previously set date, August 2, 1903 (St Elijah's Day, Ilinden in

Bulgarian) the Bulgarians of the Bitola Revolutionary district raised an uprising which spread quickly over the neighbouring districts. A republic was proclaimed in the liberated town of Kroushevo, which had become the insurgents' capital. The uprising became a general one as the Wallachian population also joined it. In order to surprise and divide the enemy forces, the uprising in Adrianople Thrace was declared on August 19 (Transfiguration Day, 'Preobrazhenié' in Bulgarian) when the fighting in Macedonia had reached its culmination point. There too a republic was proclaimed – the Strandja Republic. The uprising in Macedonia was headed by Damyan Grouev, Nikola Karev, Boris Sarafov, A. Lozanchev and others, while the one in the Adrianople region – by Mihail Gerdjikov, Stamat Ikononov and Lazar Madjarov.

The Turkish government threw a 350,000-strong regular army against the insurgents and tens of thousands of bashibozouks. The insurgents fought courageously for a long time in spite of the numerical superiority and modern armament of the enemy. It took the Turks a month to suppress the uprising in the Strandja district, the closest to the Ottoman capital, while the insurgents in Macedonia, who had been joined by thousands of volunteers from the Principality, withstood the Turkish troops in incessant bloody battles for more than three months. The revenge of the Ottoman Turks was dreadful: over 250 inhabited places were razed to the ground, thousands of insurgents and civilians were killed, over 10,000 people were left homeless and 50,000 sought refuge in the Principality.

THE NATIONAL CATASTROPHES

After the defeat of the Ilinden and Préobrazhenié Uprisings the ruling Bulgarian circles finally oriented themselves towards the preparation for a war, in order to settle the Bulgarian national question. Taking advantage of the developments in Turkey, where the Young Turks' revolution had broken out on September 22, 1908 the Bulgarian government proclaimed the country's independence, which until then had been vassal to the Empire. In 1912, under Russian auspices, the Balkan Alliance was set up, consisting of Bulgaria, Serbia, Greece and Montenegro, which waged a successful war against Turkey. Immediately after the victory, however, sharp contradictions broke out among the allies. It turned out that the Bulgarian ruling circles had paid little attention to the diplomatic preparations for the war — the treaty with Greece had not treated territorial questions at all, while the one with Serbia had given grounds to the Serbian government to have claims for additional Bulgarian lands. The treaty had specified the northwestern part of Macedonia as a 'debatable zone' whose destiny was to be decided according to the concrete contribution of the two sides to the war against Turkey and depending upon whether Serbia would receive an outlet on the Adriatic. The Russian King had been named arbitrator.

Since an independent Albanian state had been set up as a result of the war, and Austria-Hungary had retained Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia did not receive her Adriatic outlet. Under this pretext, and because she had given her heavy artillery and a division to support the

Bulgarian army in the siege of Adrianople, the Serbian government refused to withdraw its troops not only from the 'debatable zone' but also from territories in Macedonia which were indisputably Bulgarian. The Greeks also refused to withdraw from Southern Macedonia. With assistance from Russia, the Romanians received the Bulgarian town of Silistra in Southern Dobroudja as a compensation for the several thousands of Wallachians whom Bulgaria was to get in Macedonia. As a result of all this, Bulgaria, who had participated in the war with 350,000 men, that is, with 70,000 more than her allies (150,000 Serbians, 100,000 Greeks, 30,000 Montenegrins), who had acted in the main strategic direction (Constantinople), who had defeated the main forces of the Turks and had shed most of the blood, was supposed to receive far less than the other allies and to get reconciled to the fact that hundreds of thousands of its sons were to remain under foreign rule.

Instead of searching for realistic ways to have the just demands of the Bulgarian people satisfied, however, the bourgeois rulers of the country set out along a road of adventurism. On June 16, 1913, egged on by Austria-Hungary, King Ferdinand ordered the Bulgarian forces to chase away the Serbian and Greek troops from Macedonia.

While the Bulgarian army was engaged in hostilities against its former allies, Romanian and Turkish troops invaded the country from the north and southeast, totally unimpeded. The Turks reached their former frontier with

Dimiter Blagoev — founder of the Bulgarian Communist Party



Bulgaria, while the Romanian vanguards had come to only 15 km from Sofia. This brought about the first national catastrophe in Bulgaria's history. According to the peace treaties signed in Bucharest on July 28 and September 16, Serbia and Greece divided among themselves the greater part of Macedonia, Turkey received Adrianople Thrace back, and Romania was given Southern Dobroudja. Bulgaria was given the Pirin region and Aegean Thrace between the mouths of the rivers Maritsa and Mesta.

Still worse were the results from the First World War, in which Bulgaria got involved on the side of the Central Powers – Germany, Austria-Hungary and Turkey. The first military successes were followed immediately by exhaustion, hunger and dejection with the clearly apparent material supremacy of the enemy. The Bulgarian soldiers, who had been initially taken in by the noble idea that they would fight for the liberation of their enslaved brothers, fought bravely during the first year of the war, while during the following years they had to stay in the trenches and to go into attack hungry, dressed in rags and worried about the fate of their relatives who were living in dire poverty. In spite of severe reprisals and executions by the firing squads, the number of soldiers' mutinies on the front was on the increase. Strongly influenced by the two revolutions in Russia in February and particularly the 1917 October Revolution, the revolutionary moods of the masses both on the front and in the rear were growing irresistibly. The propaganda of the Bulgarian revolutionary Marxists in the army against the war acquired enormous dimensions and soldiers' revolutionary committees were set up after the example of Russia.

The troops of the Entente, having secured their numerical and technical supremacy, made a break-through in the Bulgarian positions at Dobro Polé from September 15 through 18, 1918. This speeded up the outbreak of revolutionary events which had come to a head. A considerable part of the retreating soldiers headed for Sofia with their arms to call to account the ones guilty of the imminent second national catastrophe. On September 24 the mutinous soldiers took the army headquarters in the town of Kyustendil and went on to Sofia. The government set free from prison the leader of the Bulgarian Agrarian Party Alexander Stamboliiski and his closest associate Raiko Daskalov, and sent them to reason with the soldiers. Instead of this, however, the two agrarian leaders headed the mutiny. On September 27 a republic was proclaimed in Radomir, Stamboliiski was elected president and Raiko Daskalov – commander-in-chief of the rebel army. King Ferdinand was forced to abdicate and leave the country to which he had caused immeasurable disasters and sufferings. The army of the mutinous soldiers came as far as Sofia, but it was routed there with the help of German troops.

On September 29, 1918 an armistice was signed in Salonika with the Entente. Bulgaria was occupied by the armies of the Entente. A year later a Peace Treaty was dictated to Bulgaria in the Parisian suburb of Neuilly and she was deprived of all of her newly-acquired territories – Aegean Thrace, the Strouma region, the Tsaribrod region and the region of Bossilegard, while southern Dobroudja remained under Romanian rule. The country was obliged to supply the victors with enormous quantities of food,



Alexander Stamboliiski — an eminent statesman, ideologist and leader of the democratic peasant movement in Bulgaria

coal, transport vehicles and was charged with an unbearable load of reparations, coming up to the astronomical figure of 2,250 million French francs. Once again tens of thousands of refugees from the Bulgarian territories left under foreign rule swarmed into Bulgaria, which exacerbated the country's economic and social problems.

Thus, ruled by the Austrian agent King Ferdinand and the bourgeois parties, the Bulgarian people had to live through their second national catastrophe, which was far worse than the first one.

ACUTE SOCIAL CONFLICTS

The country's normal development was hindered by the economic backwardness ensuing from the despotic feudal system of the Ottoman Empire, the lack of significant capitals of its own, the dependence on the Great Powers which were fighting for supremacy on the Balkans and the merciless parcelling up of Bulgaria after the Treaty of Berlin. Colossal means were needed for restoring the country after its five centuries of foreign yoke, and these means were collected mainly by high taxes. The unsettled national problem necessitated the formation of a numerous army whose support was a heavy burden shouldered by the population, and the country's economy. At the same time the Bulgarian capitalists, trying to compete with the foreign producers and having scanty material means at their disposal, subjected their workers and employees to

inhuman exploitation. That is why, in spite of the doubtless economic and cultural progress achieved after the Liberation, Bulgaria was one of the most backward countries in Europe as regards the people's living standards.

The sorry plight of the popular masses, combined with the rich revolutionary and democratic traditions from the period of the national-liberation struggles, was conducive to the outbreak of sharp social conflicts even during the first years after the Liberation. Bulgaria was the birth-place of Dimiter Blagoev, the greatest theoretician of Marxism in the Balkans in the late 19th century. Blagoev was born in the village of Zagorichané, Kostour district (now in Greece) in 1856. He studied in Petersburg, where he founded in 1883 the first social-democratic organization in Russia. Expelled for his revolutionary activities, he began to publish in 1885 the Marxist review *Novo Vreme* (New Times) and founded in 1891 the Bulgarian Workers' Social Democratic Party. As early as 1903 a split came to a head within the party between the advocates of revolutionary Marxism (narrow socialists) and the opportunists (broad socialists.) The former took a resolute stand against the opportunism of the leaders of the Second International and against Bulgaria's participation in the First World War. During the war they took shape as a *sui generis* left-wing current in European social-democracy, standing very close to Russian Bolshevism.

Because of the above-said concrete historical conditions, the majority of Bulgarian peasants became very soon aware of their genuine interests and as early as the end of the last century founded a political organization of their own — the Bulgarian Agrarian Party. Unlike many



Georgi Dimitrov – a prominent functionary of the Bulgarian and the international workers' movement

European agrarian parties, which usually adopted the programmes of some of the bourgeois parties, the Bulgarian Agrarian Party had its own petty bourgeois democratic ideology, which contained certain anti-capitalist elements. The Agrarian Party fought together with the narrowists against the monarchy, political reaction and the big capital. The leader and ideologist of the Agrarian Party Alexander Stamboliiski was thrown into prison for his struggle against the King and against Bulgaria's involvement in the First World War.

Being on the losing side in the war and because of her close historical ties with Russia, Bulgaria was strongly influenced by the Great October Socialist Revolution. The national disaster brought in its wake economic collapse, ruin of the national ideals and moral dejection. The prestige of the bourgeois parties which had brought about the national catastrophe was zero, while the influence and popularity of the two popular political organizations – the Bulgarian Communist Party and the Bulgarian Agrarian Party – were enhanced beyond comparison. The Soldiers' Mutiny, which formed part of the revolutionary developments that had shaken Europe after the triumph of the October Revolution in Russia, marked only the beginning of the sharp social clashes which were to take place and which put at stake the very existence of the bourgeois order in Bulgaria.

On May 21, 1920 the Bulgarian Agrarian Party won the parliamentary elections and formed an independent government of its own, with Alexander Stamboliiski at the head. This government adopted a number of reforms in favour of the peasant masses and the working people in

general, which impaired considerably the interests of big capital. Alexander Stamboliiski made no secret of his republican views and substantially limited the role played by Ferdinand's son Boris III in the country's administration. The foreign policy of the agrarian government, based on peace-loving and democratic principles, was aimed at the maintenance of friendly relations with all countries, and particularly the neighbouring ones. The units of the Russian White Army, stationed in the country, were disarmed and contacts with representatives of the Soviet government were established. In spite of the heavy international isolation of the country Stamboliiski was doing his best to defend the national interests. In the spring of 1923, he signed an agreement in Nis with the Serbo-Croatian-Slovenian Kingdom (Yugoslavia since 1929) and was on his way to make a breakthrough in the country's hostile encirclement, for which he was making systematic efforts.

The policy of the Agrarian government embittered and alarmed the reactionary forces. The referendum held in 1922 for bringing to court those guilty of the national catastrophes and the parliamentary elections in the spring of 1923 showed that these forces were hopelessly isolated from the people and had no chances of coming to power via democratic parliamentary elections. So they resorted to conspiracy. On June 19, 1923, the legitimate government of Alexander Stamboliiski was overthrown by a coup d'état carried out by the Military League which was loyal to the King, and a bloody fascist dictatorship was established in the country with Professor Alexander Tsankov at the head. The popular uprising against the

fascist coup, which broke out in many regions of the country, was crushed, and Stamboliiski was murdered after being cruelly tortured.

The usurped fascist power, however, had by far not stabilized its positions. Only three months later, on the night of September 22, 1923, a new, much better organized uprising broke out, in which agrarians and communists acted in conjunction against the common enemy. The uprising was the most massive in North-Western Bulgaria and in the region of the town of Stara Zagora. The insurgents took scores of towns and villages and established in them worker-peasant rule. The uprising was headed by the recognized leaders of the Communist Party Vassil Kolarov, Georgi Dimitrov and Gavril Genov.

The forces of the government, however, were far superior and the insurgent forces were defeated after two weeks of fighting. As after the April 1876 Uprising, towns and villages were put to fire while the role of the bashibozouks was performed with 'enviable' success by the specially formed for the purpose fascist bands — Spitzkommandos. Thousands of insurgents and civilians with progressive convictions were murdered, still other tens of thousands were thrown into prison or forced to emigrate. A new wave of white terror flooded the country after April 16, 1925, when extreme-left elements made an attempt at the life of those present at the burial service of a fascist general in the Sofia Cathedral St Nedelya. The atrocities committed by the fascist dictatorship in Bulgaria aroused the profound indignation of world public opinion and under the impact of a far-reaching international campaign of protest and popular hate the 'bloody professor'

Tsankov was forced to resign and his place was taken by less discredited reactionary politicians.

The turbulent political events between 1923 and 1925 ended in the defeat of the revolutionary forces. In many aspects, however, they paved the way to the people's forthcoming victory. An insurmountable blood-filled gap had appeared between the ruling top crust and the people, and nothing could bridge it any more. The two popular organizations – the Bulgarian Communist Party and the Bulgarian Agrarian Party – drew valuable lessons for their future activities and won well-deserved prestige among the broad people's masses. In 1933, at the historic Reichstag Fire Trial in Leipzig the celebrated leader of the Bulgarian Communist Party Georgi Dimitrov dealt the first moral and political blow to nazi fascism which was then advancing, and won the admiration of all progressive mankind. This enhanced still more the prestige of the Communist Party in Bulgaria.

NEW TRIALS

The 1920s saw the shaping up of a stable political line in the ruling Bulgarian circles which was followed unswervingly by almost all governments until the outbreak of the Second World War. This line was dictated by the unenviable international situation in which Bulgaria found herself in the wake of the two national catastrophes and was characterized by non-alignment and waiting for the opportune moment to revise the Neuilly Peace Treaty. The

Bulgarian governments were trying to maintain good relations with their neighbours and with all Great Powers. Unlike other defeated countries, they did not make open revisionist demands, but were satisfied mainly with defending Bulgaria's rights stipulated in the Peace Treaty and in the Covenant of the League of Nations, but which were never implemented: an economic outlet on the Aegean and minority rights for the hundreds of thousands of Bulgarians living in the neighbouring countries. Only the government of Kimon Georgiev, established after the military coup of May 19, 1934, made an attempt to orient the country towards France, but it was a short-lived government which could not carry out its intentions.

After 1935 King Boris succeeded in concentrating the whole state power in his hands and an open monarchofascist dictatorship was established in the country. After the outbreak of the Second World War, which faced Bulgaria with the question 'whereto?', serious debates broke out in the bourgeois camp which ended in the defeat of the faction in favour of Britain and France, and on March 1, 1941 the fascist government of Professor Bogdan Filov placed Bulgaria's signature under the Tripartite Pact. Hitler's troops used Bulgaria's territory to complete the occupation of Yugoslavia and to strike in the back the Greek Army which was fighting courageously against the Italian aggressors.

Historical experience, however, had taught even the Bulgarian fascist circles a lesson, and they tried to engage the country as little as possible in the military actions of their allies. It is impossible, however, to sell one's soul to the devil and to remain righteous. At first the Bulgarian

troops occupied only the territories where the majority of the population was Bulgarian, territories within San Stefano Bulgaria. Gradually, under German pressure, they had to occupy parts of Greece and Serbia, in order to fight against the powerful resistance movement there. In December 1941 the Bulgarian government got officially involved in the war by declaring 'symbolic war' on Britain and the USA. Restrained by the proverbial attachment and gratitude of the Bulgarian people to Russia, however, the only thing that the fascist clique never dared to do was to send troops to the Eastern Front.

Besides the pro-Western and pro-fascist groups in the country which were fighting after the beginning of the war for dictating the country's foreign policy orientation, a third group became manifest, under the leadership of the Bulgarian Communist Party. This group was in favour of closeness with the Soviet Union and resolute resistance against the Nazi aggression. At the end of 1940 the communists succeeded in organizing a genuine popular movement in support of the Soviet proposal to sign a Bulgaro-Soviet pact of friendship and mutual assistance. The government was showered with petitions, signed by tens of thousands of people, to accept the hand extended in friendship by the USSR. But it was afraid of taking such a step and rejected the proposal.

When the Nazi troops invaded the Soviet Union on June 22, 1941 the Central Committee of the Bulgarian Communist Party published an appeal to the Bulgarian people to rise in decisive battle against the Nazis and their Bulgarian stooges. Thus the Fatherland Front was set up on the initiative of the Communist Party in 1942. It was an

alliance of the anti-fascist forces in the country whose basic task was to overthrow the monarcho-fascist dictatorship and to break the fateful alliance with Nazi Germany. As early as the summer of 1941 the first combat groups and partisan detachments were formed, which began an armed struggle against the Bulgarian fascists and the Nazi units stationed in the country. The peasants sabotaged en masse the delivery of provisions and raw materials for the German army. Bulgaria was the only country where the Jews were saved from destruction because of the mass popular movement in their defence.

The partisan movement acquired particular dimensions in 1943 and 1944. The country was divided into twelve military operative zones where by the summer of 1944 there operated one partisan division, 13 brigades, 43 detachments and battalions, scores of independent detachments and hundreds of combat groups. Members of the Bulgarian Communist Party (called at the time Bulgarian Workers' Party) and of its youth union — the Workers' Youth Union — formed the basic part of the partisans. The partisans enjoyed the support of the entire people — their regular helpers alone numbered 200,000. The Partisan units and combat groups carried out over 3,000 military operations and hundreds of subversive actions which inflicted enormous damages on the fascist rule which launched against them not only the specially-formed for the purpose gendarmerie, but also a 100,000-strong regular army, which could otherwise have been put to use by the Nazi command.

In its attempts to stifle the partisan movement the fascist government committed atrocities which can only

vie with the ones perpetrated by the SS forces in the countries occupied by Germany. A prize equalling the average two-year wages of an employee was paid for killing or betraying a partisan. Public executions were carried out in order to intimidate the people. The cut-off heads of partisans stuck on poles were shown around the villages. Partisan helpers were shot on the spot without trial, their houses were burnt and their near ones left without shelter and food, were interned in far-away places. Thousands of partisans, partisan helpers and members of combat groups died in the fierce struggle, tens of thousands of anti-fascists were imprisoned or sent to concentration camps.

The armed struggle of the Bulgarian people against monarcho-fascism and Nazism was part of the struggle of progressive mankind for the routing of the Nazi aggressors. Its value stands out still more in view of the circumstance that, unlike the situation in the occupied countries, the German troops came to Bulgaria as allies and did not behave openly as occupiers. What is more, after the defeat of Greece and Yugoslavia, a Bulgarian administration was introduced in Macedonia and Aegean Thrace which created the illusion that the unification of the Bulgarian nation had been implemented at last. In this connection the monarcho-fascist government launched an unbridled chauvinistic propaganda which at first scored certain successes. This fascist propaganda concealed, of course, the fact that the final settlement of the territorial questions had been left for after the war, i. e. that it had been left entirely dependent upon the interests and intentions of nazi Germany and fascist Italy.

After the historic victories of the Red Army at

Stalingrad (represent-day Volgograd) and Kursk in 1943, and the increasingly successful operations of the Anglo-American troops on all fronts, the inevitable defeat of the forces of the Axis became evident to all. The 'symbolic war' which the Bulgarian monarcho-fascist government had declared so light-heartedly on Britain and USA, acquired real dimensions. Sofia was subjected more than once to massive bombings which caused great destructions and many casualties. Bulgaria's territory and economy had been placed entirely at the disposal of the Wehrmacht. The country was subjected to a real plunder on the part of Nazi Germany and its material resources were thawing away at disastrous rates. Bulgaria was ruined economically. A system of rationing was introduced which created favourable conditions for the flowering of the black market. Popular discontent was growing like an avalanche and helped the growth of resistance movement. From the middle of 1943 Bulgaria entered into an economic crisis which was intensifying all the time. Terror and repressions gave ever poorer results and the ruling top crust was forced to trim and manoeuvre. Several changes in the cabinet were effected, amnesty was promised to all people hiding from the authorities, provided they gave themselves up of their own free will, certain opportunities were granted for 'legal opposition' — non-fascist bourgeois political groups.

The driving out of the Nazi troops from Soviet territory and the opening of the second front in Europe in the summer of 1944, heralded the visible defeat of the Axis forces. Italy, Finland and Romania dropped out of the fascist coalition, while the Hungarian ruling circles started

searching for contacts with the Western allies. The hopes of the monarcho-fascist clique for a turn about in the military operations gave way to horror in the face of the imminent retribution. The whole country was faced with a catastrophe for it had been turned by the anti-popular ruler into a docile satellite of nazi Germany.

Bulgaria's facing a third national catastrophe aroused a turbulent political excitement and polarization of the class forces. The ruling top crust tried to avoid popular revenge by various manoeuvres. The 'legal opposition' made attempts at a collusion with Britain and USA which would have prevented the Red Army entry into Bulgaria, while the popular masses, which had old accounts to settle, fought for more radical decisions. The impending new national catastrophe and the cruelty of the fascist dictatorship writhing in agony made the previous disasters stand out in relief in their minds, as well as the rivers of blood, the gambled away national ideals... Ever broader popular strata were asking themselves the question about the reason for all this and became increasingly convinced that new in principle ways should be sought for taking the country out of the blind alley into which it had been put by their rulers. In these conditions and with the incessantly arriving announcements about the brilliant victories of the Soviet army, the prestige and influence of the Communist Party were increasing by leaps and bounds.

Having found itself in this impasse, the monarcho-fascist government began to seek contacts with the British and the Americans. It was prepared to accept the country's occupation by British or Turkish troops, hoping to rout in this way the partisan movement headed by the

Communist Party, and to block the entry of the Red Army in Bulgaria. In order to render easier the negotiations with the Anglo-Americans, on September 2, 1944 the fascist government of Ivan Bagryanov was replaced by a government of the non-fascist bourgeois parties, headed by the right-wing agrarian Konstantin Mouraviev. His government declared that it would preserve 'full neutrality' as regards the belligerent countries, i. e. that it would break with nazi Germany and would grant a broad political amnesty. These promises, however, remained unfulfilled. The retreating nazi troops passed freely through Bulgarian territory while the armed forces of the government were continuing their actions against the resistance movement. A special government envoy went to Cairo to negotiate with the Anglo-American command with a view to 'saving Bulgaria from the Bolshevik danger'.

THE PEOPLE'S VICTORY

The manoeuvres of Mouraviev's government were foiled by the decisive actions of the Soviet government and the popular uprising organized by the Communist Party. On September 5, 1944, the Soviet Union declared war on Bulgaria, and on the next day the partisan detachments and combat groups began to concentrate their forces around the big cities. On September 8 the Red Army crossed the Romano-Bulgarian frontier without firing a single shot, welcomed with indescribable enthusiasm by the Bulgarian people. The troops concentrated in Northern Bulgaria remained passive or joined the jubilant popula-

tion. This was the beginning of the popular rising to establish the power of the Fatherland Front. In Pleven, Sliven and elsewhere the people broke into the prisons and set all political prisoners free. During the night of September 8, the insurgent headquarters dealt the main blow in Sofia. Partisans, fighters of combat groups and military units which had passed over on the side of the people took the principal government institutions and arrested the members of the government.

On September 9 Radio Sofia announced solemnly early in the morning that the former government had been overthrown and a new government of the Fatherland Front had been formed in its stead with Kimon Georgiev at the head, who was a representative of the Zveno Political Union. On the same day the Fatherland Front government declared war on nazi Germany and began to withdraw its troops from Aegean Thrace and Macedonia. Total mobilization was carried out and the entire Bulgarian army was concentrated on the western frontier to form the southern flank of the Third Ukrainian Front under the command of Marshal Tolbukhin. The Bulgarian troops waged a number of bloody battles with the Germans and liberated, in conjunction with the Yugoslav partisans, large parts of Macedonia and part of southern Serbia. After that a crack army, 120,000-strong, was formed (called First Army) under the command of General Vladimir Stoichev, which fought for the liberation of Yugoslavia and Hungary.

The Bulgarian people called this war the Patriotic War, for it was of great importance for their homeland's future. Having shed the blood of 30,000 of its sons in the

war for the defeat of nazi Germany, Bulgaria appeared at the Peace Conference in Paris in 1946 with a clear conscience. The Bulgarian delegates did not deny the responsibilities of the overthrown monarcho-fascist regime, but had all the grounds to reject the Bulgarian people's responsibilities for Bulgaria's joining the Tripartite pact and appealed for a just peace. With the resolute support of the Soviet delegation Greece's pretensions for Bulgarian territories in the Rhodopes were rejected. According to the Peace Treaty signed on February 10, 1947, Bulgaria retained her pre-war territories, including Southern Dobroudja which had been received from Romania by peaceful means in 1940.

Thus, with the decisive help of the Soviet Union, the third national catastrophe, which was imminent for Bulgaria, was forestalled and popular rule was established in the country. The Communist Party and the Agrarian Party had the majority in the organs of power. The uncompromising struggle for democracy and social progress waged for scores of years and, above all, the fact that they had borne the brunt of the armed struggle against the monarcho-fascist dictatorship deservedly assigned the communists a leading role in the Fatherland Front Government. The reactionary forces challenged this leading role and tried to turn back the wheel of history, but their efforts were all in vain. The country's objective development had brought to the fore new forces, which had come from the people and which alone were capable of taking it out along new ways to a happier future.

Internal reaction which was cramped in its actions in the sharp political struggles during the first two or three

years after September 9, 1944, by the presence (until 1947) of Soviet troops, suffered defeat, and Bulgaria started enthusiastically along a socialist path of development. A people's court was organized in the winter of 1944 to try the fascist rulers and the property of diehard

The Devnya combined chemical works



fascists and reactionaries was confiscated. A decisive purge was carried out in the state apparatus and the army of reactionary elements and the organs of the new Fatherland Front power were formed. Workers' control was introduced in the industrial enterprises and decisive measures were taken to overcome the economic ruin. A nation-wide referendum was held on September 8, 1946 at which 93 per cent of the population declared themselves in favour of doing away with the vestiges of monarchy (Boris III who died in 1943 had been replaced by his son Simeon, who was under age, so that a council of regency existed alongside the government) and of establishing a people's republican government. Vassil Kolarov, the eminent leader of the communist party, was elected first President of the Republic. Georgi Dimitrov returned to Bulgaria after long years of forced emigration and took the post of Prime Minister. On December 4, 1947 a new Constitution was adopted which reflected the radical changes in the country's social and political life.

The economic policy of the people's rule was aimed at the gradual ousting of all capitalists from the economy and at its socialist reconstruction. April 1947 saw the establishment of the beginnings of a planned economy in Bulgaria with the adoption of a two-year economic plan. By the end of the same year the private industrial enterprises, mines and banks in the country were nationalized. The First Five-Year Economic Plan was worked out in 1948 and the foundations of a socialist society in Bulgaria began to be built. The anti-popular opposition was routed, the Social-Democratic Party merged with the Communist Party, while the remaining parties with the only exception

of the Bulgarian Party disbanded themselves of their own free will. The Bulgarian Agrarian Party remained independent and takes part in the country's administration shoulder to shoulder with the Communist Party. The first long-term treaties of friendship, cooperation and mutual assistance were signed in 1948 with the Soviet Union and the European people's democratic states, and during the next decade Bulgaria became cofounder of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance and of the Warsaw Treaty for defence of the socialist states.

A HOPEFUL BALANCE-SHEET

The 9th of September revolution ushered in a new epoch in the history of the Bulgarian people. In only a couple of decades Bulgaria turned from a backward agrarian country, occupying one of the last places in Europe for its national income and living standards, into an independent socialist state with a developed industry and modern agriculture, stable development rates, a rich cultural life and constantly rising living standards of the people. Bulgaria's national income increased 11-fold, agricultural output — over three times, industrial production — over 60 times, power generation — over 100 times, the number of university students — almost 20 times, etc.

Today Bulgaria ranks among the countries with large-scale modernly organized agriculture. Over 25 per cent of her arable land is irrigated and as a result of irrigation, modern cultivation, introduction of chemical fertilizers and new plant varieties, Bulgaria has come up to one of the

leading places in the world as regards yields. The average yields of wheat, for instance, reach 4,000 kg per hectare, of sugar beet — 35,000 per ha, of sunflower — 1,800 kg per ha, etc. Bulgaria is one of the world's largest producers of tobacco and attar of roses, and one of Europe's largest exporters of fresh and processed fruits and vegetables.

The country's industrialization has marked a still greater progress. Today Bulgaria has her own heavy industry — mining, metallurgical, chemical and heavy engineering industries — and light industry equipped with modern technology. The combined chemical works in Devnya are among Europe's largest, and Bulgaria is one of the foremost producers in the world of mechanical handling equipment, soda ash, storage batteries, irrigation equipment, electronic machines. The annual output of electrical power is 32,000 million kilowatt-hours, of ferrous rolled stock — 3 million tons, of cement — 5.2 million tons, of nitrogen and phosphorus fertilizers — 1 million tons, of automobile tires — 1.5 million units, of tractors — 7,700.

The country's accelerated economic development has brought about a constant rise in the people's living standards. The present-day citizen of Bulgaria has his problems, of course, but he does not know the nightmare of unemployment, enjoys free medical services and free education, lives with a confidence in the days to come. Thus, for instance, whereas in 1960-1976 period was characteristic with the spiralling processes of inflation all over the world, retail prices in Bulgaria went up 11.2 per cent (wage increase — 89 per cent.)

Particularly impressive are Bulgaria's achievements in the field of public health, education and culture. She holds

one of the foremost places in the world for the number of physicians (one per every 450 people) and university students (145 per every 10,000). There are at present 27 higher educational establishments in the country, 185 state-maintained museums, 10,407 public libraries, 4,255 library clubs, 7 state and 20 amateur opera companies, 55 theatres, scores of professional and thousands of amateur pop and folk art groups, many of which have been distinguished with international prizes.

Bulgaria maintains broad international contacts and has widely opened her doors to the world.

Bulgaria, which is entirely dedicated to peaceful and constructive labour, is a convinced and active champion of the policy of détente and peaceful cooperation among nations. Her government has demonstrated more than once its loyalty to the great ideas of peace and human progress, its will to live in understanding with all peoples and its neighbours in particular. As an equal member of the socialist community Bulgaria has her loyal friends, has all the guarantees for her national independence and is looking with assurance forward into the future.

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